



# The Planning Inspectorate

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The Chief Executive  
Warrington Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Warrington  
WA1 1UH

Your Ref:

Our Ref: PINSM/Q0640/429/1

Date: 23 September 1998

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Dear Sir

## **WARRINGTON BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN**

I am pleased to enclose the report prepared by Mr J R Collyer following the inquiry into objections to your Authority's Local Plan. The inquiry opened on 23 January 1996 and closed on 31 January 1997.

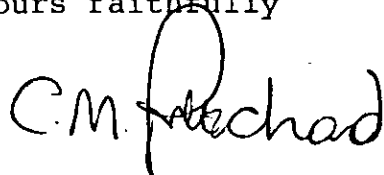
On behalf of the Inspector I would like to thank your Authority for its assistance before and during the inquiry. I feel sure that this has helped him minimise the time taken to produce this report which in turn has made an effective contribution towards achieving the Inspectorate's objective of expediting its part of the overall Plan-preparation process.

Given the very important role of development plans in the planning system, the Inspectorate assigns its more senior and experienced Inspectors to this field of work. The demanding nature of development plan work is widely acknowledged and you will appreciate that the task of conducting the inquiry and preparing this report has required a high level of professional commitment, as well as a considerable degree of stamina, on the part of the Inspector. His objective has been to produce a report which is both comprehensive and concise. I commend it to your Authority.

In principle, once the report has been submitted to you there can be no direct avenue of reference back to the Inspector. However, if there appears to be a crucial lack of clarity in the meaning of any statement, or an omission, which you consider needs to be resolved before publication of the report, I will consult the Inspector and seek amplification of those points. This can then be published as an addendum to the report. Any such reference back should be made to the Inspectorate within 3 months of the date of this letter and it would be clearly helpful to the Inspector if all the points you require clarified could be included in one letter. No such formal action is necessary in the case of any minor typographical errors which do not alter the meaning of a statement. You may correct these yourself.

I would be grateful if you could notify the Inspectorate beforehand of the date on which the Inspector's report is to be published. I would also welcome, in due course, a list of recommendations made by the Inspector but not accepted by your Committee, together with the reasons for their rejection. This is so that we may appreciate your Council's reactions to the report and its recommendations, as well as monitoring the effectiveness of our own part in the Development Plan process.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "C.M. Pritchard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "C".

C M Pritchard  
Development Plans Division

To: Mr S Broomhead MA  
Chief Executive  
Warrington Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Warrington WA1 1UH

22<sup>nd</sup> SEPTEMBER 1998.

Dear Sir

**PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO OBJECTIONS TO THE DEPOSIT DRAFT WARRINGTON BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN**

1 I was appointed by the former Secretary of State for the Environment to hold a public inquiry into objections to the Deposit Draft of the Warrington Borough Local Plan. I opened the inquiry on 23 January 1996 and sessions were held between that date and 5 July 1996. I formally closed the inquiry on 31 January 1997. In all, the inquiry sat for 48 days. I held a pre-inquiry meeting on 21 September 1995. Before, during and after the inquiry I undertook a series of visits to all of the sites that were the subject of objection as well as to others that were directly related to issues which arose from various objections.

2 The Plan, when adopted, will replace the Padgate and Penketh Town Map (1956), the Stockton Heath Town Map (1958), the Warrington Town Map (1959), the Rixton Brickworks Subject Plan (1980), the Town Centre Local Plan (1982), the Stretton Airfield Local Plan (1982), the Walton Park Subject Plan (1982), the Old Howley Local Plan (1984), the Orford South Local Plan (1984) and the Whitecross/Arpley Meadows Local Plan (1986) which hitherto have combined to provide partial statutory development plan coverage of the Borough. It will also replace the Warrington New Town Outline Plan which guided development of the New Town area from its approval in 1973 until the disbandment of the New Town Development Corporation in 1989. The Plan covers the whole of the Borough Council's administrative area and establishes the local planning policies to be applied during the period up to 2001. In November 1994 the County Council issued a Certificate of Conformity in accordance with S46 of the Town and Country Act 1990 confirming that the Plan is in general conformity with the Cheshire Replacement Structure Plan : Cheshire 2001.

3 The Plan was placed on deposit from 2 December 1994 to 13 January 1995. In response 8323 duly-made objections were received together with 2679 representations of support; the Council also agreed to accept 2 late objections. Following consideration of all these objections, in October 1995 the Council published a range of Proposed Changes to the Plan. This led to the submission of 2800 counter-objections and 2526 further representations of support. Hereafter any reference to "objections" or "Objectors" should be interpreted as including counter-objections and Counter-Objectors as the case may be. In addition, during the course of the inquiry the Council offered, or agreed to, a number of other changes which have now been consolidated into a Further Suggested Changes document; I am aware that

this has not been formally published although individual changes were, I understand, circulated wherever possible to particular Objectors to whom they were deemed to be relevant. Arising from the Proposed and Further Suggested Changes a total of 1184 objections have been conditionally withdrawn, while by the time of the close of the inquiry 163 objections had been unconditionally withdrawn. Accordingly there are 10962 remaining objections (including those conditionally withdrawn) which I am required to deal with in this report.

4 In my consideration of the objections I have taken fully into account all the submissions made by or on behalf of the various Objectors and the Council (notwithstanding that some of the subordinate matters raised are not reported), and also all other material considerations including current Circulars and Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) where appropriate. I have also borne in mind, when reaching my conclusions, the need for the Local Plan to remain in general conformity with the Structure Plan. I have not had regard to any changes in local planning circumstances which may have occurred since the close of the inquiry but the Council will no doubt wish to take such matters into account when considering my recommendations. Similarly, the Council will need to take into account any relevant Circular, PPG or other government advice which may be issued subsequent to the completion of my report.

5 Unless otherwise specified, any reference in my report to national policy or guidance as set out in Circulars or PPGs relates to those versions which were extant at the close of the inquiry. I have however taken into account Circular 1/97 (Planning Obligations), Circular 14/97 (Planning and the Historic Environment) and Circular 6/98 (Planning and Affordable Housing) as well as the revised versions of PPG1 (General Policy and Principles) and PPG7 (The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development) all of which have been issued since the close of the inquiry.

6 I have arranged my report in sections following the sequential layout of topics in the Plan; the sections are sub-divided in policy order. However under Policy LPS3 for convenience I have reported on the respective Areas of Search separately. Similarly under Policy LPS5, in relation to individual sites proposed by Objectors, I have grouped objections together under appropriate settlement headings (alphabetically listed).

7 In each reported case I specify the primary issues which the outstanding objections raise and then set out my conclusions leading to my recommendation. In most cases I have listed the relevant objections together with the Objectors' names under the respective policy titles although where these have been excessive in number I have, for the sake of brevity and ease of reference, incorporated comprehensive lists in an appendix (no 1) attached to this report. I have found it appropriate to deal with some objections wholly or partly under a different policy heading to the one identified within the Council's objection reference number; in each instance there are suitable cross-references. Finally, there are many objections which have been conditionally withdrawn as a result of a Proposed Change or Further Suggested Change against which there has been no counter-objection nor, to my knowledge, any other form of challenge. In those cases where there are no other outstanding objections to the relevant policy, and where I have no quarrel with the change, I deem it unnecessary formally to reach conclusions but have simply recommended the modification of the Plan in the manner now proposed/suggested by the Council. These cases are listed under the heading "Objections relating to other policies or provisions" which appears at the end of most sections of my report.

8 I consider it may be helpful to summarise briefly the main policy issues which have arisen from my consideration of the objections. These concern the fundamental Local Plan strategy in relation to the Bridgewater East area; the amount of land identified for housing development during the Plan period and the need to bring forward for immediate allocation certain Areas of Search; the definition of Green Belt boundaries in relation to the question of the sufficiency of land safeguarded for possible future development purposes during the post-Plan period, and the need to allocate additional sites as Areas of Search; the approach to be taken over the RAF Burtonwood site; and the safeguarding of land for Junction 8 of the M62, the Northern East-West Route, the Latchford Relief Road and the South Warrington Link. My main conclusions regarding these matters are set out below.

### **Bridgewater East**

9 I am convinced that the Council's revised approach to this site, as expounded in its Proposed Changes, is correct. The original Plan strategy, which was based on the pre-allocation of Bridgewater East for substantial housing and other development to be provided primarily within the post-Plan period, was seen as the means of securing the provision of a major piece of essential highways infrastructure, namely the North-South Route, which would have wide-ranging benefits for the strategic road network. However all the latest evidence leads me to conclude that there is no likelihood of any future comprehensive development scheme for this site being able to deliver, with any appropriate degree of certainty, a package of transportation infrastructure measures of such benefit to the wider area as to warrant special treatment in the form of a pre-allocation. Nor are there other reasons for the adoption of such a policy approach.

10 Instead I agree that the Local Plan strategy should concentrate strictly on the current Plan period, identifying in general terms the main sources of housing and employment development land up to 2001 and confirming that the Borough's longer-term needs will be addressed in a future Review (in practice, the Initial Unitary Development Plan). I am also recommending, in accordance with the Proposed Changes, that the land at Bridgewater East should for the time being be safeguarded and thus be redesignated as Areas of Search. This will give due acknowledgement to the long-established expectation that this land would eventually be developed, while ensuring that full and proper consideration can be given to the area's transportation infrastructure problems, environmental factors and the question of development need at a more appropriate time, namely the Review of this Local Plan.

### **Housing Land Supply**

11 I have concluded that there is an urgent need for the Plan to allocate more land for housing in order to remedy the shortfall of 390 units which I estimate there is against the Structure Plan requirement for about 12000 new dwellings in the Borough in the period between 1986 and 2001. The present situation has arisen largely because the Council, in producing its own land availability assessment on which the Local Plan provisions were based, has made insufficient allowance for slippage, has over-estimated the likely contribution from the Burtonwood Repair Depot site and has been too optimistic about the probable scale of future windfall/small sites provision.

12 In these circumstances, and for site-specific reasons, I am recommending that 5 further sites should be allocated in the Plan for development, all but one of which would be likely to be exclusively for housing purposes. Four of these (Peel Hall Farm, Warrington; Well Lane, Penketh; Lakeside Road, Lymm and Rushgreen Road, Oughtrington) are currently designated in the Plan as Areas of Search, while the other (Millers Lane, Oughtrington) is proposed by the Council for inclusion within the village inset boundary. The effect of these allocations is to add a further 477 units to the total housing provision to bring it marginally above the strategic requirement. This is an entirely adequate level of provision for the purposes of this Plan. I am also satisfied that this would enable the Council to demonstrate a continuing 5 years' land supply in the short term beyond 2001 in order to meet its obligations under PPG3.

### **Green Belt Boundaries and the Post-2001 Development Land Supply**

13 The situation regarding the likely longer-term land requirements is clouded in uncertainty due to the absence of definitive guidance on provision figures at both the County and Regional level. However based on the evidence currently available, and given that I am recommending the immediate allocation for development of 4 of the Plan's designated Areas of Search as well as the deletion for site-specific/policy reasons of others (including the major site at Glazebrook), I have concluded that if sufficient land is to be made available for likely housing and employment needs during the post-Plan period and if the adopted Green Belt is to remain protected for as far as can be seen ahead, then more sites must be safeguarded now for possible future development purposes. Given those considerations, there are 6 main locations (including large sites at Thelwall Heys, Twiss Farm at Culcheth and land north of the Bridgewater Canal at Lymm) where the individual circumstances justify, in my opinion, their designation as Areas of Search. The overall effect of my recommendations is to make a net addition of some 52 ha to the total amount of safeguarded land as provided for in the Council's Proposed Changes to the Plan.

14 However I also believe the Council should radically revise its assumptions about the factors on which it has based its projections of possible future development provision. By adjusting the specified residential:employment development ratio and increasing the notional housing density figure, both of which revisions are fully justified, it is clear that the amount of safeguarded land which I am recommending the Plan should identify would be adequate for the purpose of satisfying Warrington's anticipated longer-term needs; and at the same time this would ensure that appropriate protection could be maintained over this Plan's adopted Green Belt.

15 There are other much more modest alterations which I am recommending should be made to the Green Belt boundaries as shown in the Plan. In 2 cases (land adjoining the Barleycastle Trading Estate, Appleton Thorn and at the northern end of Glazebury village) this concerns the alteration of boundaries in an adopted Local Plan; however in each instance there are exceptional circumstances which justify this action. Finally I am endorsing the Council's Proposed Changes relating to the Taylor Business Park at Culcheth which together substantially alter the originally proposed Green Belt boundaries around the southern side of this village. These changes, in particular, had attracted a significant amount of local objection. However on site-specific grounds the Council's revised approach is entirely merited.

## **RAF Burtonwood**

16 The Council's policy identifying land at RAF Burtonwood as a Strategic Development Opportunity Area warrants support. Given the scale, nature, urban location and undoubted development potential of this site and in the light of national policy guidance promoting a plan-led system, it is entirely appropriate that the Plan should include provisions which establish a basic planning framework against which future proposals can be prepared and examined. While there needs to be further explanation included in the Plan regarding the constraints imposed on any such proposals by the present uncertainties about the future transportation infrastructure in this sector of Warrington, I can find no fault with the terms of this policy.

## **Safeguarding Land for Highways Schemes**

17 The Plan seeks to safeguard land for the M62 Junction 8 project and a number of other more local highways schemes. Each of the main proposals has attracted a significant measure of opposition. As for the new motorway junction, this is included in the National Roads Programme; its advantages in terms of improving traffic conditions in this sector of Warrington and facilitating further important and necessary development in the locality are well documented and, in my opinion, overwhelming. The Northern East-West Route is also a scheme of long-standing and technical work is well advanced. There is persuasive evidence that the provision of this road, which represents a vital element of the planned continuous transportation route across the northern sector of Warrington, would have many of the advantages described in relation to the new M62 junction and that it may well be necessary either in addition to that project or as an alternative if that were not in the event to go ahead. Given those considerations, I am satisfied that the safeguarding of land for these schemes is fully justified.

18 However I reach a different conclusion regarding the Latchford Relief Road and the South Warrington Link. These proposals are part of the North-South Route which is the major piece of transportation infrastructure associated with the Bridgewater East development originally contemplated by the Plan but now abandoned under the Council's Proposed Changes. There seems to be no prospect of sufficient funding being secured, or implementation becoming feasible, in the foreseeable future. Indeed the evidence clearly points to the need to undertake a full re-examination of the transportation issues in South Warrington against the background of the most up-to-date policy guidance. Nothing is programmed in this regard and inevitably it will be a lengthy process. Contrary to the Council's belief, at present there is nothing to justify safeguarding these 2 sections of the North-South Route; to continue to do so in these circumstances would be contrary to national guidance. I am therefore recommending the deletion of these safeguarding policies from the Plan.

19 As to other general matters, I would draw your attention to the schedule at the beginning of this report which, for ease of reference, provides a brief summary of my primary recommendations in relation to all the policies and proposals which are the subject of objection. Also I have attached as appendices a schedule of appearances (no 2), a list of all documents produced at the inquiry (no 3) and a list of the unconditionally withdrawn objections (no 4), together with the bundle of objection lists (no 1) to which I have already referred in this letter.

20 Additionally I would point out that throughout this report I have used acronyms for the names of certain individuals and organisations as well as for particular documents regularly referred to in the text. These are as follows: Secretary of State for the Environment (SSE), Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (SSETR), Department of the Environment (DoE), Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), Commission for The New Towns (CNT), Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE), House Builders Federation (HBF), Regional Planning Guidance (RPG), Planning Policy Guidance (PPG), Cheshire Replacement Structure Plan (CSP), Initial Unitary Development Plan for Warrington (IUDP) and Transport, Policies and Programme (TPP); I have also consistently abbreviated the Cheshire County Structure Plan - New Thoughts for the Next Century (Cheshire 2011).

21 I would confirm that a copy of this letter has been sent for information to the Head of the Housing and Planning Directorate of the Government Office for the North-West, Sunley Tower, Piccadilly Plaza, Manchester and to the Planning and Development Division of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London.

22 Finally, I wish to express my sincere thanks for the help and co-operation which I received throughout the inquiry from David Manley the Council's Barrister, Ian Estall and the rest of the Council's planning team and, of course, especially Susan Sollazzi my Programme Officer.

Yours faithfully,

*J. R. Collyer*

J R COLLYER

Inspector

cc: Government Office for the North-West, Sunley Tower, Manchester  
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Eland House, London



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## SUMMARY OF PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

This summary is not intended to represent a comprehensive record of all the recommendations in this report. Its purpose is simply to provide a brief indication of the nature of the recommended primary modifications in the cases on which I have been required to reach conclusions together with a cross-reference to the appropriate paragraph numbers.

<b>THE LOCAL PLAN CONTEXT</b>	
CHAPTER 2 Part 3	MODIFY - add further text to paragraph 3 RECOMMENDATION 2.1.4
<b>THE LOCAL PLAN STRATEGY</b>	
POLICY LPS1	MODIFY - substitute new policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (LPS1-a) and FSC (1) but with further minor modifications to the policy RECOMMENDATION 3.1.53
POLICY LPS2	MODIFY - substitute new policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (LPS2-a) but with further substantial modifications to the policy and supporting text and the allocation of additional employment and housing sites RECOMMENDATIONS 3.2.77, 3.AS1.23, 3.AS8.30, 3.AS16.16, 3.AS21.17 & 3.5.176
POLICY LPS3	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (LPS3-a) but with further modifications to the policy and supporting text and the allocation of additional Areas of Search RECOMMENDATIONS 3.2.77, 3.3.61, 3.AS2.28, 3.5.97, 3.5.139 & 3.5.219
<b>INDIVIDUAL AREAS OF SEARCH</b>	
AREA OF SEARCH 1	MODIFY - allocate for development RECOMMENDATION 3.AS1.23
AREA OF SEARCH 2	MODIFY - allocate further land as a minor extension to Area of Search 2 and consider realignment of western site boundary RECOMMENDATION 3.AS2.28
AREA OF SEARCH 3	MODIFY - realign southern site boundary RECOMMENDATION 3.AS3.18
AREA OF SEARCH 4	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.AS4.14
AREA OF SEARCH 5	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.AS5.18



AREA OF SEARCH 6	MODIFY - redesignate major part of site as Green Belt and include remainder within village inset RECOMMENDATION 3.AS6.10
AREA OF SEARCH 7	MODIFY - redesignate as Green Belt in accordance with PC (LPS3-a + b and LPS5-f) RECOMMENDATION 3.AS7.5
AREA OF SEARCH 8	MODIFY - allocate for development RECOMMENDATION 3.AS8.30
AREA OF SEARCH 9	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.AS9.23
AREA OF SEARCH 10	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.AS10.9
AREA OF SEARCH 11	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.AS11.25
AREA OF SEARCH 12	MODIFY - redesignate as Green Belt in accordance with PC (LPS3-a + b and LPS5-g) RECOMMENDATION 3.AS12.9
AREA OF SEARCH 13	MODIFY - redesignate as Green Belt RECOMMENDATION 3.AS13.26
AREA OF SEARCH 14	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.AS14.17
AREA OF SEARCH 15 (excluding Areas of Search 20 and 21)	MODIFY - redesignate as Green Belt that part of the site to the south of the Bridgewater Canal RECOMMENDATION 3.AS15.28
AREA OF SEARCH 16	MODIFY - allocate for development RECOMMENDATION 3.AS16.16
AREA OF SEARCH 17	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.AS17.14
AREA OF SEARCH 18	MODIFY - allocate additional land as an extension to Area of Search 18 in accordance with PC (LPS3-a + b and LPS5-j) RECOMMENDATION 3.AS18.9
AREA OF SEARCH 19	MODIFY - allocate additional land as an extension to Area of Search 19 in accordance with PC (LPS3-a + b and LPS5-b) RECOMMENDATION 3.AS19.12
AREA OF SEARCH 20	MODIFY - allocate land as Area of Search 20 in accordance with PC (LPS3-a + b) RECOMMENDATION 3.AS20.15
AREA OF SEARCH 21	MODIFY - allocate for development RECOMMENDATION 3.AS21.17

AREA OF SEARCH 22	MODIFY - allocate land as Area of Search 22 in accordance with PC (LPS3-a + b and LPS5-d) together with a minor additional area adjoining RECOMMENDATION 3.AS22.11
AREAS OF SEARCH 23 AND 24	MODIFY - allocate land as Areas of Search 23 and 24 in accordance with PC (LPS3-a + b) but with minor modifications to the site boundaries to take into account FSC40 RECOMMENDATION 3.AS23/4.21
POLICY LPS4	MODIFY - substitute new policy and add further supporting text in accordance with PC (LPS4-a) and FSC (2) RECOMMENDATION 3.4.6
POLICY LPS5	MODIFY - substitute new policy and add further supporting text in accordance with PC (LPS5-a) but with further minor modifications to the policy text RECOMMENDATION 3.5.14
POLICY LPS5 - INDIVIDUAL SITES	
Appleton - Bellfield Farm	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.21
Appleton Thorn - Adj Barleycastle Trading Estate	MODIFY - allocate for employment development RECOMMENDATION 3.2.77 (and see 3.5.35)
Appleton Thorn - Bradley Hall Farm	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.28
Appleton Thorn - Thornbrow Farm	MODIFY - include residential properties within village inset RECOMMENDATION 3.5.42
Burtonwood - Adj Area of Search 4	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.AS4.14
Burtonwood - Yew Tree Farm	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.51
Burtonwood - South of Alder Lane	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.55
Burtonwood - Land fronting Fir Tree Lane	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.59
Collins Green - North of Pennington Lane	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.64

Collins Green - Toll Bar House	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.69
Croft - Land at Lady Lane	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.78
Culcheth - Land north-east of village	MODIFY - allocate limited area of land as an Area of Search RECOMMENDATION 3.5.97
Culcheth - Taylor Business Park	MODIFY - include land within village inset in accordance with PC (Map 3) RECOMMENDATION 3.5.104
Glazebrook - Land north-east of village	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.111
Glazebrook - West of Glazebrook Lane	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.117
Glazebury - Opposite Chat Moss PH	MODIFY - include land within village inset RECOMMENDATION 3.5.123
Glazebury - Northern end of village	MODIFY - include residential and other properties within village inset RECOMMENDATION 3.5.130
Glazebury - South of Area of Search 12	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.AS12.9
Lymm - Land at Reddish Lane	MODIFY - allocate land as an Area of Search and consider similar allocation of adj land RECOMMENDATION 3.5.139
Lymm - South of Massey Brook Lane	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.145
Lymm - Land at Lymm Hey Lane	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.149
Lymm - Land at Yeald Brow	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.154
Oughtrington - Birchbrook House	MODIFY - include within village inset and consider similar notation on adj site RECOMMENDATION 3.5.161
Oughtrington - Hubert Jones Tankworks	MODIFY - include within village inset in accordance with PC (LPS5-1 and C2-b) RECOMMENDATION 3.5.169

Oughtrington - Junction of Rushgreen Road and Millers Lane	MODIFY - include land within village inset in accordance with PC (LPS5-1 and C2-b) and allocate for development RECOMMENDATION 3.5.176
Penketh - Land west of Area of Search 2	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.AS2.28
Rixton - Land west of Hollins Green	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.187
Stretton - Land at Tarporley Road	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.193
Thelwall - Land at Bell Lane	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.199
Thelwall - Land between Stockport Road and Bridgewater Canal	MODIFY - allocate land as an Area of Search and consider similar allocation of adj land RECOMMENDATION 3.5.219
Thelwall - Land west of the M6	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.229
Thelwall - Land at Deans Lane	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.236
Warrington - Sankey Bridges Waste Water Treatment Works	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.242
Warrington - Land east of the M6	MODIFY - include residential and other properties within settlement boundary RECOMMENDATION 3.5.249
Warrington - South of Manchester New Road	MODIFY - exclude from Green Belt and consider alternative forms of specific land-use allocation RECOMMENDATION 3.5.261
Warrington - North of Limekiln DOA	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 6.7.21
Winwick - Land at Delph Lane	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.267
Winwick - South of Winwick Link Road	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.5.274
POLICY LPS6	MODIFY - delete policy in accordance with PC (LPS6-a) RECOMMENDATION 3.6.6

POLICY LPS7	MODIFY - include new policy and supporting text in accordance with FSC (4) but with further modifications to the supporting text RECOMMENDATION 3.7.39
CHAPTER 3 Part 2	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 3.8.5
<b>GENERAL DEVELOPMENT CONTROL REQUIREMENTS</b>	
POLICY DC3	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (DC3-a) and FSC (5) but with further minor modifications to the policy and supporting text RECOMMENDATION 4.1.9
POLICY DC4	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (DC4-a) and FSC (6) RECOMMENDATION 4.2.5
POLICY DC5	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (DC5-a) and FSC (7) RECOMMENDATION 4.3.4
POLICY DC11	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (DC11-a, b + c) RECOMMENDATION 4.4.6
POLICY DC12	MODIFY - substitute new policy in accordance with PC (12-a) but with further modifications to the policy text RECOMMENDATION 4.5.12
POLICY OMISSIONS	MODIFY - include 3 new policies on renewable energy and undertake a review of the need for travelling showmen's sites RECOMMENDATION 4.6.14
<b>HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS</b>	
POLICY HR1	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (HR1-a) and FSC (10-a + c) but with further minor modifications to the supporting text RECOMMENDATION 5.1.9
POLICY HR2	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (HR2-a) RECOMMENDATION 5.2.5
POLICY HR3	MODIFY - substitute new policy and revise supporting text in accordance with FSC (11) but with further substantial modifications to the policy and supporting text, and examine the need for affordable housing provision in small rural settlements RECOMMENDATION 5.3.17

POLICY HR4	MODIFY - delete policy RECOMMENDATION 5.4.8
POLICY HR7	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (HR7-a) RECOMMENDATION 5.5.5
POLICY HR8	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (HR8-a) RECOMMENDATION 5.6.3
POLICY HR10	MODIFY - revise supporting text in accordance with PC (HR10-a) together with modifications to policy text RECOMMENDATION 5.7.7
POLICY HR13	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (HR13-a) RECOMMENDATION 5.8.3
<b>INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	
POLICY ID1	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (ID1-a, b + c) RECOMMENDATION 6.1.4
POLICY ID2	NO MODIFICATION but consider minor revision to policy text RECOMMENDATION 6.2.6
POLICY ID3	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (ID3-a) and FSC (13) RECOMMENDATION 6.3.10
POLICY ID4	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (ID4-a) but with further modifications to the policy and supporting text RECOMMENDATION 6.4.15
POLICY ID5	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 6.5.4
POLICY ID6	MODIFY - substitute new supporting text in accordance with FSC (14) but with further substantial modifications to the policy and supporting text and the deletion of the developed part of the Omega site from the designated policy area on the Proposals Map RECOMMENDATION 6.6.35
POLICY ID7	MODIFY - include new policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (ID7) and FSC (15) but with further modifications to the supporting text RECOMMENDATIONS 6.7.21 & 12.6.22
POLICY OMISSIONS	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 6.8.5

<b>ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION</b>	
POLICY ENV1	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (ENV1-a, b + c) and FSC (16) RECOMMENDATION 7.1.4
POLICY ENV2	MODIFY - substitute new policy in accordance with PC (ENV2-a) but with further modifications to the policy text RECOMMENDATIONS 7.2.13 & 7.11.10
POLICY ENV3	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (ENV3-a + b) RECOMMENDATION 7.3.6
POLICY ENV5	MODIFY - revise policy, supporting text and Proposals Map in accordance with PC (ENV5-a + c) but with further modifications to the policy, supporting text and the designated policy areas as shown on the Proposals Map at Sankey Brook and Woolston RECOMMENDATION 7.4.28
POLICY ENV7	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (ENV7-a) and FSC (19-a) RECOMMENDATION 7.5.7
POLICY ENV8	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 7.6.4
POLICY ENV10	MODIFY - revise policy, supporting text and Proposals Map in accordance with PC (ENV10-a, b + c) but with further minor modifications to the designated policy area as shown on the Proposals Map at Penketh RECOMMENDATION 7.7.6
POLICY ENV13	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (ENV13-a) RECOMMENDATION 7.8.5
POLICY ENV15	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (ENV15-a) together with modifications to the policy title and supporting text RECOMMENDATION 7.9.7
POLICY ENV22	MODIFY - minor revisions to supporting text RECOMMENDATION 7.10.5
POLICY OMISSIONS	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 7.11.10

<b>OPEN SPACE/RECREATION</b>	
POLICY OSR1	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (OSR1-a, c + d) and FSC (21) but with further substantial modifications to the policy and supporting text RECOMMENDATION 8.1.18
POLICY OSR2	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (OSR2-c) and consider modifications to the supporting text RECOMMENDATION 8.2.8
POLICY OSR3	MODIFY - revise policy text and title in accordance with PC (OSR3-a) RECOMMENDATION 8.3.6
POLICY OSR4	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (OSR4-a, b + c) RECOMMENDATION 8.4.19
POLICY OSR5	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (OSR5-a) but with further minor modifications to the policy text RECOMMENDATION 8.5.29
POLICY OSR6	MODIFY - minor revision to supporting text RECOMMENDATION 8.6.11
POLICY OSR7	MODIFY - revise policy, supporting text and Proposals Map in accordance with PC (OSR7-a, b, c, d, e + f) and FSC (23) RECOMMENDATION 8.7.38
POLICY OSR9	MODIFY - substitute new policy and title and revise supporting text in accordance with PC (OSR9-a) and FSC (24) RECOMMENDATION 8.8.5
POLICY OSR10	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (OSR10-a + b) RECOMMENDATION 8.9.6
POLICY OMISSIONS	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 8.10.11
<b>COUNTRYSIDE</b>	
POLICY C1	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (C1-a) and FSC (25) RECOMMENDATION 9.1.9
POLICY C2	MODIFY - revise policy, supporting text and Proposals Map in accordance with PC (C2-a + d and LPS5-n) but with further substantial modifications to the supporting text RECOMMENDATION 9.2.24



POLICY C3	MODIFY - revise policy, supporting text and Proposals Map in accordance with PC (C3-a + c) but with further modifications to the designated policy area as shown on the Proposals Map at Thelwall RECOMMENDATION 9.3.19
POLICY C4	MODIFY - delete policy in accordance with PC (C4-a) RECOMMENDATION 9.4.9
POLICY C5	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 9.5.4
POLICY C7	MODIFY - substitute new policy, title and supporting text in accordance with PC (C7-a) but with further minor modifications to the policy text and title RECOMMENDATION 9.6.8
POLICY C9	MODIFY - substitute new policy and revise supporting text in accordance with PC (C9-a) and FSC (26) RECOMMENDATION 9.7.4
POLICY C11	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (C11-a) RECOMMENDATION 9.8.6
POLICY C12	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (C12-a) RECOMMENDATION 9.9.5
POLICY C14	MODIFY - include new policy and supporting text and designate sites on Proposals Map in accordance with PC (C14 and Maps 47-52) and FSC (27) but with further modifications to the policy text, and consider further modifications to the policy text and the key to the Proposals Map RECOMMENDATION 9.10.12
POLICY OMISSIONS	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 9.11.3
<b>LISTED BUILDINGS/CONSERVATION AREAS</b>	
POLICY LBC1	MODIFY - substitute new policy and revise supporting text in accordance with PC (LBC1-a) RECOMMENDATION 10.1.3
POLICY LBC2	MODIFY - substitute new policy and revise supporting text in accordance with PC (LBC2-a) RECOMMENDATION 10.2.4

POLICY LBC4	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (LBC4-a) but with further minor modifications to the supporting text RECOMMENDATION 10.3.6
POLICY LBC5	MODIFY - substitute new policy and revise supporting text in accordance with PC (LBC5-a) RECOMMENDATION 10.4.6
POLICY LBC7	MODIFY - delete policy in accordance with PC (LBC7-a) RECOMMENDATION 10.5.3
POLICY LBC8	MODIFY - include new policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (LBC8) but with further minor modifications to the supporting text RECOMMENDATION 10.4.6
POLICY OMISSIONS	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 10.6.9
<b>TOWN CENTRE AND SHOPPING</b>	
POLICY TCS1	MODIFY - revise policy text in accordance with PC (TCS1-a) and FSC (28) but with further modifications to the policy, title and supporting text, and consider further modifications to the supporting text RECOMMENDATIONS 11.1.14 & 11.18.35
POLICY TCS2	MODIFY - substitute new policy text in accordance with FSC (29) but with further modifications to the policy text RECOMMENDATION 11.2.27
POLICY TCS3	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (TCS3-a) but with further substantial modifications to the policy and supporting text, and consider further modifications to the supporting text RECOMMENDATION 11.3.31
POLICY TCS4	MODIFY - delete policy RECOMMENDATION 11.4.9
POLICY TCS5	MODIFY - delete policy in accordance with PC (TCS5-a) RECOMMENDATION 11.5.7
POLICY TCS6	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 11.6.21
POLICY TCS7	MODIFY - revise policy in accordance with PC (TCS7-a) RECOMMENDATION 11.7.5

POLICY TCS10	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 11.8.5
POLICY TCS11	MODIFY - delete policy in accordance with PC (TCS11-a) RECOMMENDATION 11.9.4
POLICY TCS12	MODIFY - delete policy in accordance with PC (TCS12-a) RECOMMENDATION 11.10.4
POLICY TCS13	MODIFY - substitute new policy text in accordance with PC (TCS13-a) but with further modifications to the supporting text RECOMMENDATION 11.11.8
POLICY TCS14	MODIFY - substitute new policy text in accordance with PC (TCS14-a) RECOMMENDATION 11.12.5
POLICY TCS15	MODIFY - substitute new policy and revise supporting text in accordance with PC (TCS15-a) but with further modifications to the policy and supporting text RECOMMENDATION 11.13.5
POLICY TCS19	MODIFY - delete policy in accordance with PC (TCS19-a) RECOMMENDATION 11.14.3
POLICY TCS26	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 11.15.8
POLICY TCS27	MODIFY - substitute new policy text in accordance with PC (TCS27-a) RECOMMENDATION 11.16.6
POLICY TCS29	NO MODIFICATION but consider modifications to policy text RECOMMENDATION 11.17.5
POLICY TCS30	NO MODIFICATION but consider the deletion of this policy in conjunction with modifications to Policy TCS29 RECOMMENDATION 11.17.5
POLICY OMISSIONS	MODIFY - consider redevelopment options for Dalton Banks Works and allocate site accordingly, substitute appropriate notation on Proposals Map for land at Winwick Quay, include new policy on Peel Hall Farm Neighbourhood Centre and notate land accordingly, consider examining the retail potential of sites at the edge of Warrington town centre and allocating land accordingly, making related modifications to the supporting text of Policy TCS1 RECOMMENDATION 11.18.35

TRANSPORTATION	
POLICY T1	MODIFY - substitute new policy text and title and revise supporting text in accordance with PC (T1-a) and FSC(30) RECOMMENDATION 12.1.10
POLICY T2	MODIFY - revise policy, supporting text and Proposals Map in accordance with PC (T2-a + b) RECOMMENDATION 12.2.14
POLICY T3	MODIFY - revise policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (T3-a + b) and FSC (32-a + b) RECOMMENDATION 12.3.14
POLICY T4	MODIFY - substitute new policy and revise supporting text in accordance with PC (T4-a) and FSC (33) RECOMMENDATION 12.4.20
POLICY T5	MODIFY - substitute new policy and supporting text in accordance with PC (T5-a) but with further minor modifications to the policy text RECOMMENDATION 12.5.6
POLICY T6	MODIFY - substitute new policy and revise title and supporting text in accordance with PC (T6-a) and FSC (34) but with further modifications to the policy and supporting text and, subject to specified provisos, to the Proposals Map RECOMMENDATION 12.6.22
POLICY T7	MODIFY - revise supporting text in accordance with PC (T7-b) and FSC (35) but with further modifications to the policy, title, supporting text and Proposals Map, including deleting all reference to the Latchford Relief Road RECOMMENDATION 12.7.22
POLICY T8	MODIFY - substitute new policy and title and revise supporting text in accordance with PC (T8-a) and FSC (35 + 37) RECOMMENDATION 12.8.19
POLICY T9	MODIFY - delete policy and the associated Proposals Map notation RECOMMENDATION 12.9.6
POLICY T10	MODIFY - revise supporting text in accordance with PC (T10-a) RECOMMENDATION 12.10.4

POLICY T11	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 12.11.4
POLICY T12	MODIFY - revise policy, supporting text and Proposals Map in accordance with PC (T12-a) and FSC (38) RECOMMENDATION 12.12.6
POLICY T13	MODIFY - substitute new policy text and title in accordance with PC (T13-a) RECOMMENDATION 12.13.5
POLICY T14	MODIFY - substitute new policy and revise supporting text in accordance with PC (T14-a) and FSC (addendum) but with further minor modifications to the policy and supporting text RECOMMENDATION 12.14.4
CHAPTER 12 : FOREWORD	MODIFY - delete paragraph 17 in accordance with PC (T-Foreword-a) RECOMMENDATION 12.15.3
POLICY OMISSIONS	MODIFY - revise Proposals Map in accordance with PC (T-Omission-a) RECOMMENDATION 12.16.30
<b>PROPOSALS MAP</b>	
Land at Hawleys Lane, Warrington	MODIFY - subject to specified provisos, delete employment permission notation RECOMMENDATION 13.1.5
Land at Manchester Road, Woolston	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 13.1.5
<b>OTHER MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTIONS</b>	
Land at Westbrook - school and community facilities	NO MODIFICATION but review the need for further schools provision and if necessary include new policy and allocate land accordingly RECOMMENDATION 14.1.12
Howley Power Station - design treatment	NO MODIFICATION - RECOMMENDATION 14.1.12
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
Appendix B2	MODIFY - review content of Appendix and correct as necessary RECOMMENDATION 4.5.12
New Appendix	MODIFY - include new Appendix regarding housing land availability RECOMMENDATION 3.2.77

## **SECTION 1 : INTRODUCTION**

### **CHAPTER 1 PART 5 : THE SCOPE AND FORMAT OF THE LOCAL PLAN**

**OBJECTIONS:**            Conditionally Withdrawn  
                                 O/06345/INTRO/02977                    Department of the Environment  
                                 O/06010/DC/02948                    Federation of Cheshire Green  
                                 (part reported)                        Parties

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**1.1.1            That Chapter 1 Part 5 be modified in accordance with Proposed Change ,  
                                 INTRO-a.**

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## **SECTION 2 : THE LOCAL PLAN CONTEXT**

### **CHAPTER 2 PART 3 : THE CURRENTLY-OPERATIVE STRUCTURE PLAN**

**OBJECTION:**            O/06085/CONTEXT/02955            Satnam Investments Ltd

#### **Primary Issues**

- 2.1.1            ●        Should the provision of affordable housing be excluded from the strategic housing policy figure for Warrington.

#### **Inspector's Conclusions**

2.1.2            This part of the Plan summarises certain comments made by the former SSE in his approval of the CSP. His letter (paragraph 8.10) makes it clear that most affordable housing provision will be included in the strategic housing policy figure for Warrington and other districts; however any such housing permitted as an exception in rural areas will be regarded as additional to the strategic provision. The supporting text to CSP Policy H7 confirms this point. The reference in the Local Plan accurately reflects this. The Objector has mistakenly sought to apply the declared approach to the "exceptions" sites to all affordable housing provision.

2.1.3            The Council's interpretation of the CSP text is correct. The reference to "extensive areas of Green Belt" in districts other than Warrington confirms the expectation that no permissions would be granted exceptionally in this Borough's Green Belt. However, for completeness, and for the avoidance of any doubt, I consider that an additional sentence clarifying the position would be beneficial.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1.4            **That Chapter 2 Part 3 be modified by the addition to paragraph 3(b)(iv) of the words "HOWEVER, IF ANY AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS PERMITTED IN RURAL AREAS AS AN EXCEPTION TO NORMAL POLICY THIS WILL BE REGARDED AS ADDITIONAL TO THE STRATEGIC PROVISION FIGURE".**

## OBJECTIONS RELATING TO OTHER PROVISIONS OF THE LOCAL PLAN CONTEXT

OBJECTIONS:	<u>Conditionally Withdrawn</u>	
	O/06346/CONTEXT/02977	Department of the Environment
	O/06006/LPS3/02948	Federation of Cheshire Green Parties
	O/11017/ENVAPP/02948	Federation of Cheshire Green Parties
	O/06349/ENVAPP/02977	Department of the Environment
	O/07562/ENVAPP/03970	Cllr Peter Black

## RECOMMENDATION

- 2.2.1 That Chapter 2 be modified in accordance with Proposed Changes PLAN CONTEXT-a and PLAN CONTEXT-b.
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## **SECTION 3 : THE LOCAL PLAN STRATEGY**

### **POLICY LPS1 : DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

**OBJECTIONS** - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (pages 1 - 3)

#### **Primary Issues**

- 3.1.1
- Should the future development strategy be based on the pre-allocation of land at Bridgewater East for substantial housing and other development, including major transportation infrastructure, for provision within, but primarily in the longer term beyond, the Local Plan period.
  - Alternatively, should the strategy concentrate strictly on the Local Plan period and be based essentially on the development of only such land as (i) is already the subject of planning permission, (ii) consists of unidentified sites within urban areas, (iii) comprises major developed sites within the Green Belt, (iv) is subject to approval under Section 7(1) of the New Towns Act and (v) is allocated for development under Policies LPS2 and LPS7; with provision for longer-term development needs only being addressed in a future review of the Local Plan.

#### **Inspector's Conclusions**

3.1.2 As to the first issue, the Bridgewater East area as identified in the Deposit Draft Plan represents the final phase of the planned development of Warrington New Town. There has been substantial housebuilding activity in this general area for several years and significant commitments still remain unimplemented. Approved development proposals are not expected to be completed within the Local Plan period. The Deposit Draft Plan acknowledges that these commitments would not take up the whole of the land area originally allocated for long-term development in the New Town Outline Plan; the Council initially saw this as an opportunity to establish a viable framework for the achievement of a long-term package of development by which completion of the originally intended New Town programme would take place and, at the same time, make a significant contribution to the Borough's strategic housing requirement in the years beyond the Local Plan period.

3.1.3 A vital element of this package was the provision of a major piece of highways infrastructure, namely the North-South Route, which the Warrington Transportation Study (a joint County/Borough Council study on whose findings the Local Plan transportation policies and proposals are based) had concluded was required to enable the full development of Bridgewater East to take place. This scheme would also have very much wider benefits and it features significantly in long-standing proposals for the overall New Town urban highway network; it is seen as providing potential relief to the well-acknowledged

environmental and traffic congestion problems in South Warrington, particularly along the A49, A50 and A56.

3.1.4 At the Deposit Draft stage the Council's expectation was that evidence could be produced by the CNT, the land-owner, as to the viability of the development package particularly in terms of providing reasonable assurance that this body and the County Council, as Highways Authority, could jointly fund the road scheme.

3.1.5 Although the greatest weight of objection to the Deposit Draft policy is on the grounds that Bridgewater East should not be allocated for any development purpose but should be included within the designated Green Belt, it is appropriate that I turn initially to transportation considerations since these have had the most influence on the Council's decision in the Proposed Changes to alter completely the direction of the Plan strategy by deleting the pre-allocation of Bridgewater East and effectively demoting the uncommitted land here to the status of Areas of Search under Policy LPS3.

3.1.6 The North-South Route as presently envisaged comprises 2 principal sections, the South Warrington Link (which includes a high-level bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal) and the Latchford Relief Road. These schemes are safeguarded under the provisions of Local Plan Policies T7 and T9.

3.1.7 However, late in 1995 the County Highways Authority decided formally to abandon these 2 schemes (they were included in the 1995 published TPP for 1996 - 2001). This was based on the conclusion that in the current planning and funding context the resources to construct the roads (at a total estimated cost of some £30m) will not be made available.

3.1.8 The CNT's position regarding essential roads provision is that it is prepared to make a significant contribution towards the costs involved out of the revenue realised from the sale of development land at Bridgewater East, although the extent of this contribution (which would be proportionate to those elements of the transportation infrastructure directly attributable to the said development) could only be determined closer to the time when the road is built.

3.1.9 I am convinced that the Council is right to be concerned about the prospects for funding the North-South Route (or any alternative measures which may in the future be deemed more appropriate for resolving South Warrington's transportation-related problems). The CNT, as owner of the potential development land at Bridgewater East, has committed itself to making a contribution; but understandably, and properly in the present planning climate, this would only cover a proportion of the total funding necessary. Moreover the extent of this proportion in real terms is unknown. It is also notable that the CNT is to be wound down in 1998; while it appears likely that a successor body would be appointed to take over both its interests and obligations, this does add another dimension to the uncertainty which surrounds the potential funding of the North-South Route.

3.1.10 The CNT has sought to address many of the problems which the South Warrington Link/Latchford Relief Road was intended to solve by putting forward a package of wide-ranging measures in conjunction with its proposals for the full development of

Bridgewater East, all of this being in support of the case for pre-allocation in the manner intended in the Deposit Draft Plan. This package, the CNT maintains, could be funded by the associated development proposals and would accommodate all the traffic arising therefrom. As a fall-back provision, the CNT has designed an intermediate masterplan which proposes a reduced highways package and a more limited scale of development involving less land. This package too, it is said, could be funded by the CNT.

3.1.11 This package of measures and the traffic impact assessment which supports it have been subject to a detailed appraisal by the Council's consultants. They identify certain shortcomings in the methodology and assumptions used to develop the package; they remain doubtful about how satisfactory the operation of some of the proposed improvements might be; they consider that particular land-take requirements have been under-assessed by the CNT; and, significantly, they conclude that the proposals to upgrade the existing high-level bridge over the Ship Canal would be inadequate and that an additional high-level crossing would be required. As a result, the consultants calculate the costs of the package to be much greater than the CNT estimates. Based on those conclusions the Council maintains its view (as now represented in the Proposed Changes) that the package of highway measures does not provide justification for the pre-allocation of Bridgewater East, either in regard to the full development or the intermediate masterplan. The County Highways Authority adopts a similar position.

3.1.12 It is clear to me that while the CNT's full highways package shares many common features with the South Warrington Link and Latchford Relief Road schemes, the lines of which the Deposit Draft Plan still seeks to safeguard and which until recently had been supported by the County Highways Authority, there are some significant differences. The most notable of these are the absence of (i) any new high-level crossing over the Ship Canal, (ii) a link between Knutsford Road and Farrell Street, and (iii) an alternative to the increased use of Station Road.

3.1.13 Following the Council's appraisal the CNT now acknowledges that such a bridge might be necessary; and it says that the additional costs incurred could be met, as before, from development land sales revenue. Yet even these concessions do not overcome the uncertainty which there undoubtedly is about when, realistically, the full highways package might be implemented. The major elements of this package would, even according to the CNT, not be completed until 2009-2012, towards the end of the anticipated development programme and obviously well beyond the time horizon of this Local Plan; and this programme does not account for any extra work (and funding) associated with an additional high-level bridge.

3.1.14 Moreover, given that this package is intended to serve a much wider function than simply enabling the existing road network to accommodate traffic stemming directly from the Bridgewater East development, eventual full funding from that source cannot be guaranteed. The CNT's declared commitment, and the Council's ability to secure funds through agreements and obligations, is limited. In these circumstances, or in the event that the full North-South Route were pursued instead, then the prospect of finding alternative public sources of revenue to complete the funding appears to be remote in the extreme, especially in the short to medium term, given that the County Highways Authority has now abandoned this scheme.

3.1.15 I am mindful that the Borough Council is shortly to become a Unitary Authority, at which time it will assume responsibility for certain highways matters. Whether this would lead to public funds becoming available however is not known. This factor clearly does not reduce the present uncertainty about the prospects of implementing the full highways package.

3.1.16 As for the intermediate masterplan, the associated highways package is, in effect, no more than self-serving; it simply provides the means to enable the existing road network to cater for the extra demands placed on it by the scale of development which the proposed pre-allocated land might reasonably be expected to accommodate. There is nothing exceptional about this; it is an arrangement which is little different to that found in the case of many other Areas of Search either proposed in the Plan or by other Objectors.

3.1.17 In short, neither the full scheme nor the intermediate masterplan are capable of delivering with any appropriate degree of certainty a package of transportation infrastructure measures of such benefit to the strategic highway network as to warrant special treatment as a pre-allocation.

3.1.18 In these circumstances, are there other reasons why the Bridgewater East area should continue to play such a central role in the Local Plan's development strategy?

3.1.19 There is a long-established policy commitment to development in this area, stemming from the New Town Outline Plan some 25 years ago. In 1989 the former Development Corporation made its final submission for the development of the whole of Bridgewater East. The former SSE granted approval under Section 7(1) of the 1981 New Towns Act for only part of these proposals however; in an accompanying letter it was confirmed that regarding that part of the proposed development area for which Section 7(1) approval was not granted the future use would need to be considered within the normal land-use planning framework. The Development Corporation and the CNT have between them invested very substantially in land acquisition and infrastructure in anticipation of development in this area. Detailed proposals for Grappenhall Heys, one of the Section 7(1) approval areas, have been prepared as have schemes for 2 major distributor roads; construction work on each of these projects is expected to commence in the relative short term.

3.1.20 The CNT maintains that pre-allocation now would simply represent a further step in the widely anticipated, continuing development of the Bridgewater area. I am aware that the approved CSP describes this area as an acknowledged location for housing and accepts the concept of the gradual release of land for this purpose. Development has progressed at Bridgewater over many years and there is a commitment, in the form of the Section 7(1) approvals and related investment, for yet more. This in itself however is no reason to plan positively at the present time for further significant expansion.

3.1.21 In the years since the start of the New Town programme much regarding the general planning policy climate and local land-use considerations has changed. Appropriately, the Local Plan provides the opportunity to examine the question of future development at Bridgewater East in the context of current planning circumstances; to my mind past history is not an overwhelming consideration.

3.1.22 The CNT's concern to secure through the present Plan an appropriate measure of certainty about the future development prospects for its own land is understandable; clearly this would enable further investment and infrastructure to be planned ahead with confidence. But equally the Plan-maker must have confidence that any decision to allocate land would facilitate the development of the right site at the right time. Clearly the Council no longer has that confidence; and nor, for reasons which I shall now describe, do I.

3.1.23 On environmental grounds there is a significant measure of opposition, primarily from the local community, to the prospect of any further development in this area at any time. I can well appreciate their point of view. In general terms Bridgewater East is part of an attractive stretch of open, rolling countryside comprising mostly farmland but broken by belts of trees and several substantial blocks of woodland. Adjoining to the north-east and south in particular there is further extensive open countryside. Yet despite the inherent qualities of the Bridgewater East landscape, the influence of nearby substantial urban development on the local environment is all too evident. From many vantage points both within and outside the subject area the backdrop of housing, especially the extensive development to the west, is clear to see; housing at Appleton Thorn to the east, albeit on a much lesser scale, also has a noticeable impact on the character and appearance of these immediate surroundings. Another particularly significant consideration is that the approved development on the Section 7(1) sites will undoubtedly have an appreciable effect on this landscape given their scale (61 ha and over 800 dwellings in total) and location.

3.1.24 Even so, the potential further development of Bridgewater East would represent a major urban expansion into essentially open countryside. The uncommitted land which the Deposit Draft Plan promotes as a pre-allocation covers a substantial area of some 140 ha; it is envisaged that this would accommodate extensive new housing in the order of 2000 units along with limited employment and shopping development, community and recreational facilities and a range of related infrastructure.

3.1.25 I shall examine later [*see paras 3.AS23/4.4 - 9*] the merits of those objections which call for this area to be designated as Green Belt. For the purposes of judging the primary issue arising under Policy LPS1 however I am satisfied that, in the light of the landscape qualities of the Bridgewater East area and its generally open character, there are strong arguments on physical environmental grounds which support the principal transportation-related reasons, as described above, for not allowing its pre-allocation for development purposes on the scale contemplated by the Deposit Draft Plan.

3.1.26 In reaching this conclusion I have taken into account the CNT's masterplan for potential site development. Doubtless proposals could be designed in a manner which minimises their impact both environmentally and ecologically on the surrounding area, which would relate well with existing development and would embrace the Section 7(1) sites to form a cohesive and comprehensive urban expansion. Similarly I acknowledge the wide-ranging community benefits which would be likely to accrue from the provision of various facilities and from specified landscaping initiatives; certain highways infrastructure too could be secured.

3.1.27 However in my judgment the weight of legitimate counter-argument on environmental grounds is such that it would be wrong of the Local Plan to give pre-eminence

to this site. I take the same view regarding the CNT's intermediate masterplan. Both the total area of land and the scale of potential development would be less than that of the full scheme but the considerations, in principle, are the same.

3.1.28 I recognise that a mixed-use development of this extent and nature, and the provision of associated infrastructure in the manner proposed by the CNT, is only likely to be achieved if a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach is adopted; pre-allocation would provide that opportunity. However there is no compelling reason to believe this would necessarily be the only such opportunity.

3.1.29 An additional major concern of many Objectors is that any large-scale development of Bridgewater East would have serious consequences in terms of increased traffic congestion over a wide area; in particular it would worsen existing problems at the Stockton Heath and Latchford shopping centres and in the vicinity of the 2 nearest swing bridges over the Ship Canal.

3.1.30 It is well documented that the major roads in the South Warrington area suffer traffic congestion at times, especially in the locations identified by Objectors; my own inspections confirm this. Yet while the envisaged development of Bridgewater East would add significantly to the traffic in this wider area, I do not share the Objectors' fears. The problems they specify are precisely the sort which the Deposit Draft version of Policy LPS1 aimed to resolve by ensuring the provision of necessary transportation infrastructure in tandem with future development. The prospect that such infrastructure could not be secured with certainty has led the Council to abandon that policy, a course of action which for reasons explained in earlier paragraphs I support. It seems clear to me that if ever further development were in the future contemplated at Bridgewater East the Council would seek to ensure that before permitting any scheme to be built measures would be taken to enable the traffic generated to be satisfactorily accommodated. Other Local Plan policies provide for this.

3.1.31 Evidence on the extent to which the development of Bridgewater East might accord with planning guidance on sustainable development has been submitted by both the CNT and other Objectors alike in support of their respective cases.

3.1.32 Clearly a development of the scale envisaged, which provides employment opportunities and shopping/community/recreational facilities reasonably close to a substantial resident population, includes extensive footpaths and cycle routes throughout the area, incorporates a park and ride facility and is likely to stimulate the provision of bus services, would have distinct merits in terms of meeting well-acknowledged sustainable development objectives. The fact that it would be well-related to the existing South Warrington urban area and would "draw-in" the Section 7(1) sites enhances its standing in these respects.

3.1.33 On the other hand there is some force in the argument raised by certain Objectors that this is fundamentally the wrong location for further substantial development because it has no viable public transport system; there is no nearby rail station and bus services are limited. It is also relatively distant from Warrington's principal employment areas which are on the north side of the town.

3.1.34 A number of Objectors also criticise the associated provision of major highways infrastructure, primarily the South Warrington Link, essentially on the grounds that this is a car-based solution to a problem which could and should be resolved by other, more sustainable, transportation measures. In principle that is a laudable claim. However it seems questionable whether there is a realistic alternative solution. As late as 1994 the County and Borough Councils produced the Warrington Transportation Study which, in its foreword, professes that its recommendations, as followed through into Local Plan policies, reflect current national guidance on transport and land-use planning. This Study found in favour of the South Warrington Link along with certain other sections of the North-South Route; it does not appear to regard any alternative solution as a viable option. In any event, if in due course the relevant Authorities were to decide (as a result of a further study of South Warrington's longer-term transportation issues which the County Council is urging the Borough Council to undertake jointly as part of the ongoing CSP review) that alternative measures, better aligned with PPG13 and other such guidance, would be more appropriate than the CNT would, I am aware, continue with its commitment to making a contribution towards funding any such measures.

3.1.35 As for the other "sustainable development" objections, the evidence before me is limited, and what has been submitted is highly subjective. In particular none of the arguments raised can reasonably be regarded as applicable exclusively to Bridgewater East.

3.1.36 In conclusion on this point, even though this area has some locational disbenefits, overall there is nothing about the Deposit Draft Plan proposals for Bridgewater East which is seriously inconsistent with the principles of sustainable development; here I bear in mind that the Council still has the opportunity to consider alternative sustainable transportation measures for which funding contributions from any development have been promised. However I would not regard the attributes of this area to be so outstanding as to justify pre-allocation especially when judged against all other considerations.

3.1.37 Another significant claim made by the CNT in favour of the Deposit Draft Plan development strategy is that the uncommitted area at Bridgewater East is a vital component of the housing land supply for the post-2001 period and that without its pre-allocation now the Council will be unable to demonstrate a continuing 5 years' supply in the latter stages of the current Local Plan period.

3.1.38 While the supporting text in the Deposit Draft Plan endorses that argument quite forcefully, the sum total of evidence on housing land supply submitted by the Council and various Objectors convinces me that this is not the case. I examine this matter in detail under Policies LPS2 and LPS3. Given my conclusions about the adequacy of the land supply up to 2001 and for the years immediately beyond (subject to my recommendations for new allocations being adopted), I am satisfied there is no need on this basis for pre-allocating Bridgewater East.

3.1.39 Several Objectors criticise the Deposit Draft Plan development strategy for being over-reliant on a single large site which, it is said, would be contrary to national guidance; they call for a strategy which provides for a range of development opportunities throughout the Borough and which demonstrates how overall provision for housing will be made within the Plan period. I agree.

3.1.40 PPG3 clearly encourages local plans, subject to environmental considerations, to provide for a variety of sites (for new housing) in terms of both size and distribution; they should be in areas where potential house buyers want to live and be suitable for the wide range of housing types which the market requires. Additionally, regarding employment development, PPG4 calls for plans to provide for choice and flexibility in the provision of sites. In my opinion to centre Warrington's future development strategy on just the Bridgewater East area, especially since there are no longer any exceptional circumstances to support its promotion above all other options, would not be the best way of following that guidance. Moreover it is remarkable that the declared strategy of the Deposit Draft Plan is concerned almost exclusively with making provision for development in the post-Plan period.

3.1.41 The strategy of the Local Plan should instead concentrate essentially on the present Plan period (although embracing considerations regarding a continuing 5 years' housing land supply) and be aimed at positively facilitating necessary development on a range of sites in a variety of locations, subject of course to environmental, transportation, infrastructure and other such constraints. Indeed this is, in essence, the approach which the Council now prefers to adopt under the terms of the Proposed Changes version of Policy LPS1. I comment on this in more detail shortly when dealing with the second primary issue.

3.1.42 In summary regarding the first primary issue, there is no sound reason why Warrington's development strategy should be centred on the continuing development of Bridgewater East in the manner described in Deposit Draft Policy LPS1.

3.1.43 A few objections to the Deposit Draft version of Policy LPS1 remain outstanding. Some criticise in detail the assessment of Warrington's overall housing land supply. However this is not, as such, an issue with which this particular policy is concerned and I shall not deal with those objections here. These matters are covered in my consideration of Policy LPS2. Other Objectors call for particular sites to be identified in the policy, either alongside or instead of Bridgewater East. In view of the foregoing conclusions and since I intend, for the reasons explained below, endorsing the Proposed Changes which completely alter the thrust of the Plan's development strategy, I shall not pursue those objections here. In each case there is a corresponding objection under another policy heading which seeks an allocation either for development within the Plan period or as an Area of Search. I shall deal with the merits of those sites elsewhere in this report under the terms of the alternative relevant policy.

3.1.44 Lastly, **United Cinemas International** say that the Plan's development strategy should include specific provisions concerning the need for the new Junction 8 on the M62 and specifying the prohibition of further development in the north-west sector of Warrington until it is built. Provision for safeguarding the land required for Junction 8 is already included in the Local Plan under Policy T6. Although the need for this junction is well documented, the terms of the policy controls sought by the Objector are not justified; they are over-prescriptive and not supported by any compelling evidence. There are other policies in the Plan which provide safeguards against allowing developments which would bring about unacceptable traffic and highway conditions. Moreover this is not an appropriate matter for inclusion in the Plan's overall development strategy for the whole Borough.



3.1.45 As for the second primary issue, I have referred above to the general approach of the Proposed Changes version of Policy LPS1 (LPS1-a). This identifies the 5 sources of housing and employment development on which the Plan's strategy to 2001 will be based and goes on to confirm that long-term needs will be addressed in a future Review (now to be the IUDP). For the reasons given earlier [see paragraph 3.1.41] I endorse this general approach.

3.1.46 There have been several counter-objections. The CNT's arguments I have already dealt with. **Wimpey Homes Ltd** and **McLean Homes Ltd** originally contended that the entire policy is superfluous; however following the Council's Further Suggested Change (FSC1) which alters the introductory text of Policy LPS1 they confine their objections to one point. They say that those provisions which relate to the post-2001 period are inappropriate since they go beyond the scope of this Plan and concern matters which should properly be addressed in the future IUDP.

3.1.47 To my mind Policy LPS1, in the form now put forward by the Council, provides a valuable overview of the approach to development control which the Plan aims to adopt, and which subsequent policies expand on and explain. It also confirms the manner in which the Council intends to address the matter of future development needs beyond the present Plan period; this too is helpful and necessary because the policies and proposals of this Local Plan will determine housing provisions in the immediate years post 2001 in order that a continuing 5 years' land supply is achieved.

3.1.48 Several other Objectors claim that the changed strategy still fails to identify sufficient housing land either to meet strategic requirements up to 2001 or to enable the Council to maintain a 5 years' supply during the years beyond that date. It is argued that too much emphasis is now placed on the development potential of **Burtonwood Repair Depot (BRD)**, a site which because of infrastructure and other difficulties is unlikely to yield the number of dwellings estimated in the Plan. Changes are sought to the policy to enable Areas of Search to be brought forward for development if the suggested shortfall materialises.

3.1.49 I am satisfied these claims have no foundation. The strategy is not over-reliant on the BRD site; there are several sources of housing land identified and the numerical contribution which this site is estimated to make represents just a small proportion of the total anticipated dwelling capacity. Moreover it is necessary for me to repeat my earlier conclusion about the housing land supply issue; for reasons explained later under the Policy LPS2 heading I am content that the Council can (subject to adopting my recommendations for new allocations) meet its strategic housing requirement within the Plan period and maintain a 5 years' supply in the short term beyond. Also that, contrary to the assertion made by many Objectors, it is likely that the Council will be able to proceed sufficiently well with its IUDP to ensure continuing future satisfactory provision. The Local Plan strategy is not therefore misguided in this respect. In these circumstances, there is no need for provision to be made within the terms of Policy LPS1 for the early release of Areas of Search prior to the preparation of the IUDP.

3.1.50 **Arlington Securities plc** seeks the inclusion within this policy of provisions enabling further Areas of Search to be allocated in the IUDP and further reviews of that Plan. This pre-supposes that the Areas of Search identified in this Local Plan will prove to be inadequate for the purpose of meeting future development needs; for reasons explained later

in this report under Policy LPS3 I disagree. Also, it will be for the Council to decide at the time of the preparation of the IUDP what sort of policies and proposals are necessary and appropriate for inclusion in that Plan. No such commitment as sought by this Objector should be made at the present time.

3.1.51 **Peel Holdings plc** suggests alterations to the initial part of the policy text to enable further land, if it were required as a result of the emerging CSP Review requirements and IUDP proposals, to be brought forward prior to 2001; also to substitute "Development Plan" for "Local Plan" later in the text. At the Inquiry the Council agreed to these alterations, the first of which is now embodied in the Further Suggested Changes document (FSC1). I agree that they help clarify this policy and shall therefore endorse them.

3.1.52 However other changes sought by this Objector, which the Council resists, are not well founded. It is suggested that the concluding terms of this policy improperly seek to anticipate development land priorities which will be established in the next Plan review. I disagree. The clear message in national guidance is to make full and effective use of urban land for development in order to reduce pressure on the countryside; it lays particular emphasis on the benefits of urban regeneration. RPG13 takes precisely this approach and "Cheshire 2011" follows suit. It is thus more than evident to me that the Council is fully justified in identifying, as it does, the principles on which the IUDP will base its development land strategy.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.1.53 **That:**

**(i) Policy LPS1 be modified by the deletion of the existing policy wording and supporting text and the substitution therefor of new wording and text in accordance with Proposed Change LPS1-a and Further Suggested Change FSC1 but further modified by the deletion from the final paragraph of the policy of the word "LOCAL" and the substitution therefor of the word "DEVELOPMENT";**

**(ii) no other modification be made to Policy LPS1 in response to those objections which propose further alterations to the text of the policy or its Reason and Explanation.**

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## **POLICY LPS2 : EMPLOYMENT LAND ALLOCATION**

**OBJECTIONS** - List of objections (including objections under reference LPS2.3) attached at Appendix 1 (pages 4 - 11)

### **Primary Issues**

- 3.2.1
- Are there exceptional circumstances which justify the release of land to the east of Barleycastle Trading Estate, Appleton from the designated Green Belt thereby facilitating its allocation for employment development as proposed in the Deposit Draft Plan.
  - Is there justification for the allocation for employment development of additional land, both in the vicinity of Barleycastle Trading Estate and in specified locations elsewhere in the Borough, having regard to the environmental circumstances of each proposed site and the need for such development.
  - Does the revised policy in the Proposed Changes document specify with sufficient clarity the Local Plan's approach towards retail development on existing or allocated employment land.
  - Is there a need to allocate additional land for employment purposes during the Plan period in order to make adequate provision for such development having regard to strategic requirements.
  - In terms of the housing land provision schedules introduced into this policy by the Proposed Changes, based on strategic requirements and the need to maintain an adequate continuing land supply has sufficient provision been made.
  - Does the revised policy in the Proposed Changes document contain unnecessary and inappropriate detail in terms of the schedule of housing provision and the lists of sites.

### **Inspector's Conclusions**

3.2.2 As for the first primary issue, the Barleycastle Trading Estate is a substantial area of employment development providing a wide range of modern facilities primarily for storage and distribution purposes. It falls within the area of the Stretton Airfield Local Plan which was adopted in 1982; all the immediate surrounding land is designated as Green Belt. This estate has excellent links to the nearby M6 junction from where the M56 too can easily be reached; HGV traffic using this junction does not need to pass through residential areas. I understand that the trading estate has proved to be very successful for storage and distribution firms and little land remains available within the existing allocated area. I see

no reason to dispute the Council's argument that further provision made at this time would enable the estate to maintain its valuable role within the local economy. The site now in question is exceptionally well placed to serve just this purpose.

3.2.3 The additional employment allocation which Policy LPS2 proposes would represent an extension of relatively modest scale (7.65 ha) involving land which is part of the former military airfield. A major estate road, apparently capable of serving this extra land, is already in place and there is no evidence of any infrastructure constraints. Given the significant influence which the existing trading estate already has on the environment hereabouts, the development of the subject site for employment purposes would be unlikely to have any serious adverse impact on the generally open character of the wider surroundings. In all the circumstances the loss of this land from the designated area would not weaken the Green Belt hereabouts in terms of its ability to serve its acknowledged purposes.

3.2.4 In this regard it is worth noting that in the Stretton Airfield Local Plan the present allocation site, together with land to its east, was excluded from the Green Belt and reserved for longer-term development purposes. The recommendation of the Local Plan Inquiry Inspector in 1981 to modify that Plan and include all this land in the Green Belt was based not on any objection against development in principle, but for reasons relating to the lack of any need for such a reserve of land within the Plan period, uncertainty about the provision of infrastructure and the effect on the amenities of residents due to the absence of a link road to the M6. Since that time however the situation has changed. The trading estate has become much better established and there is a general acceptance that the provision of additional land here would be beneficial in local economic terms, there are no longer any infrastructure problems with there being capacity to accommodate further development and the link road to the M6 is in place.

3.2.5 To my mind, contrary to the views expressed by the former DoE and **Warrington Civic Society**, the foregoing circumstances are, in combination, sufficiently exceptional to justify altering the adopted Green Belt boundaries around this trading estate thus enabling the proposed site to be allocated for employment development. Accordingly the guidance in PPG2 is satisfactorily met. In essence those circumstances are described in revised supporting text to Policy LPS2 as set out in the Council's Proposed Changes (part of LPS2-a) and I shall endorse its inclusion in the Plan. However additionally the text should be explicit that these represent exceptional circumstances justifying the alteration of the adopted boundaries. A further advantage, albeit not an "exceptional circumstance", is that this additional allocation would make an important contribution towards meeting a modest shortfall in Warrington's strategic employment land requirement to 2001. I refer to the land supply position in more detail when reporting on the fourth primary issue.

3.2.6 Regarding the second issue, **Limewood Developments Ltd** seeks the allocation of further land on the eastern side of Barleycastle Trading Estate for employment development. This involves a slightly larger area (some 8.9 ha) than the above-mentioned Plan allocation and this site too lies within the adopted Green Belt having been the subject of the Local Plan Inquiry Inspector's recommendation as referred to earlier. The objection land, much of which is actively farmed, is open in appearance. However its boundaries are well defined by the re-aligned Barleycastle Lane to the north and east as well as the motorway to the south and these features, together with the imposing presence of large-scale buildings

on the trading estate to the west, create a noticeable measure of containment. Furthermore, in locational terms this land has precisely the same attributes as the Plan's allocated site.

3.2.7 In these circumstances it is illogical and unreasonable for the Council to insist that the Green Belt boundary should not be altered to exclude the objection land from the designated area. In Green Belt terms this and the allocated site deserve to be treated comparably. In fact this is the better proposition because drawing back the Green Belt boundary in this way would result in a much more appropriate and defensible boundary than the one proposed by the Local Plan. In summary therefore there are exceptional circumstances in relation to this site which are just as cogent as those which justify the Local Plan allocation.

3.2.8 As for **Limewood's** proposal that this land should be allocated for employment development, there are several persuasive points in its favour. In quantitative terms it is evident from my assessment of the present land supply position as described under the fourth primary issue that the modest shortfall identified in the Proposed Changes document is an under-estimate of the true situation. While for the reasons explained in that assessment I am unconvinced that this is a critical matter which the Local Plan must necessarily address, it would be irresponsible and inappropriate to ignore the opportunity which the present objection site provides for remedying substantially the anticipated shortfall.

3.2.9 In addition there are obvious qualitative reasons for such an allocation. The Council already confirms (in relation to its own allocation) that the extension and enhancement of the trading estate would be most welcome in local economic terms. There is no evidence to suggest that a further extension on the scale now intended would do anything other than increase those perceived economic benefits still more. The objection site is perfectly well placed to achieve this. It would also be a useful addition to the employment land supply in terms of widening the range and distribution of sites thereby helping to provide a greater degree of choice and flexibility. According to the Council's land availability statement the sites which are currently, or expected soon to be, available are mostly much smaller than this and only a limited number are located in the southern part of the Borough.

3.2.10 While in reaching those conclusions I have taken note of the Objector's arguments about the demand for sites in Warrington for distribution warehousing, I am mindful that the strategic requirement is simply to make provision for a specified total amount of employment land; it does not seek to apportion this provision amongst a range of particular uses. Furthermore, **Limewood's** corresponding claims that land for distribution warehousing purposes in the whole North-West Region is in short supply do not influence me greatly. First, the Council's evidence contradicts these claims; and secondly, even if there were any such shortage which needed to be addressed then I would expect this to be reflected in the Structure Plan in the first instance. This is not a matter to which the Local Plan should respond directly.

3.2.11 However given the quantitative and qualitative land supply considerations, I am convinced that the allocation of the objection site for employment development is justified. As with the Plan's allocated site, no general environmental harm would be likely to arise. Also, there is no evidence of any infrastructure or other technical constraint to such development. Although the Council points out that some of this site comprises Grade 2 and

3a agricultural land, it is not claimed that national guidance about the need to protect land of this quality is an overriding consideration in the present case. I explain my general approach to this particular issue later in this report [see paras 3.AS1.8 - 11]. In the light of those considerations I conclude that the advantages of providing additional employment land of the scale and nature, and in the location, now proposed carry the greater weight. To accommodate this further allocation only minor modifications to the terms of the policy and its supporting text are necessary. These are contained in my recommendation.

3.2.12 A number of local businesses and individuals ask for land to the west of the Taylor Business Park at Culcheth to be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated for employment development. The Council has agreed to this and the Proposed Changes document includes such a provision. However this has attracted a substantial amount of counter-objection.

3.2.13 This business park lies to the south of Culcheth a short way beyond the former railway line which marks the boundary of this rural settlement. On all sides there is open land although the stretch northwards to the settlement is quite narrow. The park covers a sizeable area and appears to be almost fully developed; it consists of a range of industrial buildings used for various employment purposes.

3.2.14 The land now in question is primarily a wide grassed area of some 4.7 ha at the front of the business park beside the main road. Because of its close relationship with the existing industrial buildings and its relatively limited size this piece of land does not contribute greatly to the generally open character of the wider surroundings; nor in itself does it perform any notable Green Belt function. Indeed its development would represent a straightforward extension of the business park up to a firm and defensible boundary (the main road) and no serious environmental harm to these immediate surroundings would be likely to arise.

3.2.15 The Culcheth and Glazebury Action Group, whose case has received express support from a considerable number of individual Objectors, originally raised an argument concerning the need to demonstrate exceptional circumstances in view of this site's location in the Green Belt. Although the Action Group has since conceded that this argument is erroneous in the present circumstances, given the amount of other local objection it is necessary that I comment on this matter.

3.2.16 PPG2 confirms that the question of "exceptional circumstances" arises in 2 instances, when considering the alteration of either the general extent of a Green Belt as approved in a Structure Plan or Green Belt boundaries as defined in an adopted Local Plan. First, while the allocation site is within the general extent of the Green Belt as described in the approved CSP, it is not of such a scale that this proposal could conceivably be regarded as altering that general extent. Secondly, as for adopted Local Plans, there is none which defines the Green Belt boundary around Culcheth. Consequently this is not an issue in the present case.

3.2.17 Counter-Objectors also claim that traffic associated with the future development of the subject land would unacceptably worsen existing congestion and parking difficulties in Culcheth. I have seen the problems which arise during peak times on the principal

approach roads and especially in the village centre and can understand the reason for so much local concern. However, while it is inevitable that further development here would add to the amount of traffic on the main routes, there is no conclusive evidence that the situation in Culcheth would become so significantly worse as a direct result of the employment land allocation now proposed by the Council that this particular Plan provision should be deleted. In this regard, considering the overall size of this settlement the proposal represents only a relatively small development increment. And it would be the case that an assessment of traffic impact would remain a matter for consideration in detail at such time as any firm scheme is brought forward. If problems were found then I am confident that the Council would seek to ensure they would be properly addressed; Local Plan Policies ID1 and DC4 would help in this regard.

3.2.18 Other grounds of objection raised by some of those living closest to the business park concern the loss of residential amenity due to noise and disturbance stemming from activities on the proposed site. However I am not convinced that any significant harm would be likely to arise. The nearest houses are separated from this site by a band of open ground and a small copse. Buildings on the allocated land could be no closer to those properties than the existing business park premises and of course the precise nature of any future activities in those buildings is unknown. Thus, any concerns at this stage about noise and disturbance are purely conjecture and this is not a tenable basis for deleting the proposed allocation.

3.2.19 As to the question of need, the Council sees the allocation of additional land here as an appropriate response to the imbalance which is occurring at Culcheth between continuing housing development and decreasing local employment opportunities. I have no reason to disagree particularly given the evidence that 2 sizeable employment sites and a former hospital in the village have each been redeveloped for housing in recent years. In this regard therefore, the Council's changed proposal is consistent with the guidance in PPG13 which encourages provisions that increase opportunities for people, including those in rural areas, to work near their homes. Also, from a broader perspective this allocation would make a helpful contribution towards meeting the modest shortfall which I have found there is in Warrington's overall strategic employment land requirement to 2001.

3.2.20 In dealing with this matter I recognise that this is one of a package of 3 Local Plan proposals concerning the Taylor Business Park. For convenience I deal with the others elsewhere in this report under their respective policy headings [see paras 3.AS22.1 - 11 and 3.5.98 - 104] but I would confirm here that my conclusions on each one are mutually consistent.

3.2.21 Given the foregoing considerations, I intend endorsing the Proposed Changes (LPS2-c, LPS5-c and the relevant part of LPS2-a) although it is appropriate that one minor modification be made to the extent of the allocated area. On Map 3 of the Proposed Changes document the northern site boundary is shown to follow a rather arbitrary line through the small copse at the roadside. It would be appropriate for environmental reasons if this copse were excluded entirely from the employment land allocation. Preferably it should be taken wholly into the Area of Search which is proposed for the adjoining land to the north-east [see para 3.AS22.10] where the protection of this copse (if deemed necessary) could probably be better secured as part of any planned development which may be allowed. Thus the

employment land allocation should extend only so far as the existing hedged field boundary between the north-western corner of the business park up to the main roadside.

3.2.22 **Villagate Properties Ltd** proposes that land at Yewtree Farm, Appleton Thorn be allocated for employment development, specifically as a small-scale business village. This is a small site lying directly west of the Barleycastle Trading Estate. There is open land on the other 3 sides although just to the south-west is the built-up edge of Appleton Thorn village. The land is currently occupied by a farmhouse and a group of brick barns which at one stage had the benefit of planning permission for conversion to office use. This site lies within the Green Belt as shown in the adopted Stretton Airfield Local Plan and the present Plan proposes this should remain unchanged.

3.2.23 Despite the close proximity of the trading estate there is a clear distinction between the heavily built-up nature of this extensive employment area and the more open, almost rural character of Yewtree Farm. The objection property relates well to the open fields which largely surround it and which, altogether, provide a valuable measure of separation between the trading estate and the village. The development of this site, in the manner the Objector intends, would reduce still further this already narrow gap and would spoil the character of these immediate surroundings.

3.2.24 For these reasons it is entirely appropriate that the objection site should remain within the Green Belt and I can find no exceptional circumstances to justify altering the designated boundaries. Despite the Objector's claim that there is a need for more small employment units in the southern part of Warrington, the Council's evidence demonstrates that a noticeable number of such premises are currently available within the Borough as a whole including 2 units on the adjoining trading estate. Thus there appears to be no pressing need for the release of the objection site. I have taken into account the encouragement which national guidance gives to measures for meeting the needs of small businesses; both the CSP and this Local Plan express a similar view. However, on this occasion the Green Belt considerations are overwhelming.

3.2.25 Lastly in regard to the second primary issue, **North West Water Group plc (NWW)** seeks the allocation of land at Lingley Mere, Warrington for employment development. This land forms part of the Omega site in respect of which Policy ID6 specifically applies and corresponding objections have been made to that policy. I have dealt with the relevant issues under that policy heading [see paras 6.6.22 - 34]. Similarly, **Warrington Collegiate Institute** seeks a mixed development allocation (including employment) on land at Winwick Road Campus, Warrington and I deal with this entire matter elsewhere [see paras 8.5.13 -22], while **Greenalls Group plc** proposes an employment allocation for land off Loushers Lane, Latchford; again, there are other related objections which are reported elsewhere [see paras 8.7.33 - 36]. In each case, given my conclusions on the matters raised, I am recommending that no modification be made to the provisions of Policy LPS2.

3.2.26 Regarding the third primary issue, the Proposed Changes version of Policy LPS2 sets out the strategic employment land requirement and how it is to be met. It is evident that there has been confusion in the assessment of employment land provision due to the fact that originally retail development had, in accordance with the terms of the Structure



Plan, been included in the previous figure whereas now, following recent national guidance on the subject, it is not. The supporting text to the revised policy identifies this problem but goes on to confirm unequivocally what the current attitude is towards the interpretation of employment land provision. The policy too is in terms which make it perfectly clear how it is expected the strategic requirement can be met without taking into the calculation any retail development completions or commitments.

3.2.27 **Langtree Property Company Ltd** says the Plan should specify that there is no policy objection to the retail development of employment land; also a clear definition of employment land uses is called for. I consider that a policy statement of the sort suggested is unnecessary. There are several shopping policies in the Local Plan which would appear to provide an entirely adequate basis on which to judge the merits of any retail proposal whether it be on employment land or not. As for the second aspect of this objection, "employment land" is a generic term which is widely used in development plans and planning guidance. There is nothing in the evidence before me to suggest that any benefit would arise from the inclusion within the Plan of a list of recognised employment uses; indeed it is more likely that any attempt to do so would lead to disputes and simply create unnecessary difficulties.

3.2.28 In respect of the fourth issue, **NWW** claims that the Council's assessment of available employment land is flawed and that as a consequence a shortfall of nearly 41 ha against strategic requirements arises. I note that Policy EMP1 of the CSP requires that between 1986 and 2001 provision be made in Warrington for about 325 ha of land for employment development; "about" is interpreted as + or - 5 ha. The Local Plan identifies that up to March 1995 some 308.9 ha were available by way of completions and development either under construction or permitted; this figure excludes retailing development, the historical significance of which I have explained above. The allocations proposed in this Plan provide an additional 12.35 ha, none of which would be intended for retailing. The adjustment to the boundary of the allocated site at Culcheth [see para 3.2.21] would, in strict terms, result in a minor reduction in the recorded area. However for the purpose of my calculation here of the land supply, the change is so insignificant that I shall disregard it. And in any event the effect would be simply to transfer the subject land from the pre-2001 identified supply to the post-2001 potential supply. Thus, according to the foregoing figures the total provision (321.25 ha) falls just within the strategic requirement tolerance allowed by the CSP. More recent evidence from the Council which should now be included in the Plan shows that at April 1996 the total provision stands at 320.02 ha, still within the specified margins of acceptability.

3.2.29 However there is some substance in the Objector's claim. The breakdown of commitments is set out in the Council's Employment Land Availability Statement (1996). Included are several small sites owned by the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) or its associate company but there is clear evidence that not all of these can be regarded as genuinely available. **NWW** says that 7 sites should be discounted. Having studied information supplied by agents for the UKAEA, in the case of 5 sites which are described as not surplus to the owners requirements I agree. However the remaining 2 (references W93 and W156) are both said to be surplus; the first is already sold off and the second is expected to be sold before 2001. In these circumstances both can justifiably be regarded as available although I acknowledge that the recorded area of W156 should be reduced in order

to reflect the amount of land genuinely developable. As a result of these considerations the sum of committed land should be reduced by 10.37 ha.

3.2.30 There are 4 other sites which **NWW** challenges. However 2 of these (Winwick Quay North and Pipe Lane) which have been permitted for other development purposes have already been discounted from the Council's most recent calculations of available land; and as for the other 2, both are Local Plan allocations which I am endorsing. Thus no further reduction of the Council's figure is warranted on this score.

3.2.31 **NWW** also asks that an allowance should be made for the likely "loss" of identified employment land to other uses, in particular retailing; **Langtree** makes a similar plea. I recognise that historically there have been several instances of identified land being developed for retailing. Yet that is not too surprising given that until fairly recently the interpretation of strategic policy allowed for this. The Council's argument that many such sites only appeared in the employment land schedules because they were suitable or permitted for retailing is persuasive. The situation appears to be that since the start of the CSP period and up to 1996 only some 16.83 ha of land identified for general employment purposes has been "lost" to retailing; however of that total some 12 ha was taken for 2 major developments which appear to have been regarded as exceptional and for this reason I agree with the Council that they should be discounted for the purpose of estimating possible future losses. Thus a fair assessment would be that nominally some 2.5 ha (ie 0.5 ha per annum for the remainder of the Plan period) at most should be allowed for in the calculations since this is broadly equivalent to past trends.

3.2.32 However in practice I decline to make such an adjustment. First, the overall provision in the Local Plan is very largely comprised of completions and commitments by way of planning permission. Secondly, the latest version of PPG6 has given added weight to the protection of employment land from retailing, as has current strategic thinking on this subject; certain provisions of Policy TCS3 give effect to this guidance. Thus there is now less likelihood of such permissions being granted than hitherto. Thirdly, no account has been taken in the Plan's employment land availability assessment of windfall provision; yet the Council's uncontested evidence is that previously unidentified sites consistently come forward and historically have amounted to considerably more than 0.5 ha per annum.

3.2.33 In summary therefore, only a reduction for the unavailable UKAEA sites is justified and Policy LPS2 should be modified accordingly. However this is largely off-set by the addition to the supply of my recommended allocation regarding land to the south and west of Barleycastle Lane [see paras 3.2.6 - 11]. By reason of these adjustments the identified provision at April 1996 amounts to 318.55 ha; this represents a shortfall of some 6.45 ha against the strategic requirement although it is only marginally outside the specified tolerance.

3.2.34 To my mind this is not an unacceptable situation. When the CSP requirement was set it was anticipated that retail developments would contribute to the provision; even though they no longer do so, the strategic figure remains unchanged. The available evidence suggests that had the original interpretation of employment land provision still applied, the specified requirement would have been comfortably met. For these reasons I have serious reservations about how much weight should be given to what is, in any event, a relatively

modest shortfall in identified provision. In all the circumstances I conclude that no further allocations need be made.

3.2.35 As for the fifth primary issue, the Council's Proposed Changes, primarily in response to 2 objections from the former DoE to the Local Plan general strategy (both since conditionally withdrawn), completely alter the nature and scope of Policy LPS2. This version identifies how provision is to be made for housing and employment land in order to meet strategic requirements. While there are no counter-objections to this form of policy in principle, there are many which take issue with detailed aspects of the housing land supply assessment.

3.2.36 In examining this matter my starting point is the approved CSP requirement for Warrington. CSP Policy H1 specifies that this District must make provision for about 12000 new dwellings between 1986 and 2001; "about" is interpreted by the CSP as + or - 100. The Local Plan assessment of how this requirement will be met relies on the Council's Housing Land Availability (HLA) Statement which has a base date of 1 April 1995. This identifies that up to 31 March 1995 there had been 7905 completions on sites where development was either complete (Category A sites) or, as then, still incomplete (Category B). There has been no express dispute with that figure.

3.2.37 However **Satnam Investments Ltd** contends that the total provision figure should be reduced by 221 units to reflect the number of dwellings which have been achieved by way of conversions and changes of use. It is argued that because the strategic requirement refers to the "release of land for new dwellings" then those units derived from either of the above sources should not count as part of the total provision. This does not seem reasonable.

3.2.38 The deposit CSP had expressly included conversions/changes of use as a source of dwellings contributing towards the housing provision requirement. Although the former SSE modified the wording of the relevant policy, neither he nor the EIP Panel commented on this particular aspect. Thus there appears to have been no intention of excluding the potential contribution from conversions/changes of use. Nor to my mind would there be any sense in doing so; a new dwelling, from whatever source it might derive, should be welcomed as another increment to the housing stock. In this context I note that the County Council has not challenged Warrington's assessment of housing provision. In all the circumstances, no reduction should be made.

3.2.39 The remainder of the Council's forward assessment of land supply for the period April 1995 - March 2001 is the subject of considerable criticism, particularly by the **HBF** and several major housebuilding firms. To my mind this is not too surprising because the HLA Statement has been prepared by the Council alone. It is regrettable there has been no joint study undertaken with the housebuilders since this sort of study, which is commended in PPG3, would clearly have enabled the Plan to have been better informed and given its housing provision policy a more secure foundation.

3.2.40 A major issue concerns the incorporation of an allowance for slippage to acknowledge the fact that for a variety of reasons the development of identified sites does not occur as quickly as HLA studies first expect. The research report prepared by Roger Tym and Partners and commissioned by the former DoE probably best describes those reasons;

ownership and marketability are the main constraints, while others including infrastructure, access, ground conditions and planning are of less importance. The Tym report suggests that, in circumstances where Councils and housebuilders are unable to reach agreement on assessing the availability of sites, an allowance for slippage should be applied to the figures; the recommended discount is about 10%. Given that this research is specifically referred to in PPG3, I consider it deserves to be accorded significant weight. Also I am aware that the application of this sort of allowance has been accepted as being appropriate in a number of other Local Plans.

3.2.41 The Council however resists Objectors' claims for the inclusion of a 10% slippage factor in the assessment of completions between April 1995 and March 2001 both on sites where development had begun before April 1995 (Category C) and on New Town Programme sites where development had not begun before that same date (Category D). In this regard the Council maintains that Warrington is a special case. I am not convinced by its arguments however.

3.2.42 I acknowledge that most sites included within those 2 categories in the HLA Statement are forecast to have been built out at least 2 years before March 2001; therefore, as the Council says, slippage of up to 2 years would still enable completions to be achieved within the Plan period. However, while there is some substance in that argument, there is no evidence before me to suggest that slippage is normally confined only to a 2-year time-span. As for the pressure to ensure that sites actually come forward which, the Council claims, will reduce the likelihood of slippage, in my experience pressure for the development of land for housing is not a phenomenon exclusive to Warrington.

3.2.43 Regarding New Town sites, I recognise that the Council's forecast of 270 completions at Grappenhall Heys and Appleton Cross is well below the CNT's own figure of 435 units. However there is nothing to say that the estimate made by the CNT (as landowner) is necessarily realistic, especially since actual housebuilding activity will depend on the disposal of land to developers and their attitude as to marketability. On the other hand the Council's figure does at least have the merit of having been assessed impartially as part of a comprehensive, Borough-wide exercise; and it does compare quite favourably with the overall rate of development achieved in recent years in the whole Bridgewater area. A number of Objectors doubt the Council's assessment on the grounds that the Howshoots Link Road, a pre-requisite to the development of these 2 sites, would not be constructed in sufficient time. However the County Highways Authority and the CNT are close to agreement on the details and funding of this road scheme. Once the formal S278 Agreement is completed housing development at Grappenhall Heys could commence I am told, with the implementation of the road scheme to follow. Thus, in all these circumstances I prefer to rely on the Council's forecast for these 2 major sites but only to the extent that it should form part of the total New Town sites estimate to which, as I will shortly confirm, a slippage allowance should be applied.

3.2.44 As for the remaining New Town sites, the fact that they are in a single ownership is no reason to discount entirely the possibility of slippage occurring. While land ownership is identified in the Tym report as the single most important constraint, there are several others any of which could apply just as easily to New Town sites as they could to those in other ownerships. And in this regard it is significant to note that the Council readily

accepts the justification for including a 10% discount for slippage in relation to non-New Town sites (Category E).

3.2.45 Another valid argument which some Objectors raise lends weight to my concerns about the Council's estimate of New Town site provision. There is no convincing evidence that the build rates for some areas such as Pewterspear, Kingswood and Whittle Hall could realistically double (as the Council claims) in the next few years as compared with actual performance in these areas in the 5 or 6 years prior to April 1995. I acknowledge that there will be a continuing reduction in the outstanding capacity of New Town sites elsewhere and that there is a relative paucity of further identified sites in the wider Bridgewater area; also there has been a recent upturn in output from certain areas, notably Whittle Hall. Yet overall, past average building rates can reasonably be regarded as reflecting the marketability of housing and the ability of housebuilders to respond to demand and there is nothing from the housebuilding industry to suggest that what the Council says about certain of the build rates for New Town sites is correct.

3.2.46 This matter needs to be addressed. However I do not propose alterations to individual site forecasts because the information available is inadequate for such purposes and in any event this sort of exercise is far from being an exact science. To my mind, the simplest and most satisfactory solution to this particular problem, and to the rest of the uncertainty about the reliability of the Council's New Town sites estimate, is to impose an appropriate discount for slippage on the total provision.

3.2.47 For all these reasons, and in the interests of producing a robust assessment for Local Plan purposes, I conclude that a 10% discount for slippage should be applied to housing not yet started at April 1995 within Categories C and D. Also I welcome the Council's proposal, against which there has been no objection, to make a similar reduction to the Category E provision estimate.

3.2.48 As for the assessment concerning sites allocated for housing in the Local Plan (Category F), there has been considerable objection to the figure given for Burtonwood Repair Depot (BRD). The Council contends that development on this site will commence in 1996 and produce 540 houses by March 2001. I have little confidence about this.

3.2.49 There has been a history of delay over bringing this site forward. Although the Council resolved to permit development in January 1994, for various reasons, including the completion of a S106 Agreement, consent was not issued for 2 years. There are several other known constraints and while I accept the Council's point that most of these are being actively addressed, from the information available it does not appear that at mid-1996 any detailed approval would be imminent. More importantly there is compelling evidence from those marketing this site that housebuilding would not commence until mid-1997.

3.2.50 Furthermore, the Council's estimated build rate appears over-optimistic when judged against average annual yields from large sites elsewhere in Warrington, and in this sector especially. Those figures, coupled with evidence from several major housebuilders, suggest that at best a rate of some 100 units per annum (pa) might reasonably be expected once construction is fully under way. There is also powerful evidence from those same sources that during the first 2 years of development there would be a reduced level of

completions, particularly since in those years (assuming a mid-1997 start) there would still be competition from significant housebuilding activity in the nearby areas of Kingswood and Whittle Hall.

3.2.51 Given those circumstances and in an endeavour to reach a balanced view on all the various yields for the BRD site which have been suggested by the Council and Objectors, I conclude that this site will provide 325 units (comprising Year 1 (97/98) - 50, Year 2 - 75, Years 3 and 4 - 100 pa) during the Plan period. Coincidentally, this provision would fall just within the threshold figure beyond which substantial highways improvements would be necessary before any further development could take place. This consideration adds weight to the cogency of my estimate. I regard this as a realistic analysis which takes full account of the possibility of slippage. Thus it is unnecessary to apply the 10% factor here.

3.2.52 As for the only other allocated site, Padgate Campus, no issue is taken by any Objector regarding the Council's forecast and even if any slippage were to occur it would make only a minimal difference to the overall housing land equation.

3.2.53 The remaining specified source of housing provision is windfalls/small sites (Category G). The Council's estimate is based on past annual yields from these sources simply extrapolated forward. The results of this exercise must be treated with caution. These figures derive from a period when there has been no adopted Local Plan. There is no allowance made to acknowledge the fact that in future years the present Plan will influence the extent to which such provision might continue to arise. First, potential windfalls, which are sites of between 0.4 ha and 1 ha in size according to the Council's definition, are henceforth likely to have been identified since the Local Plan expressly attempts to do so; therefore these sites would no longer be regarded as windfalls. Secondly, given that environmental, ecological and other policies of this Plan seek to impose greater constraints on development in urban areas than hitherto, it seems inevitable that the scale of small sites provision (described by the Council as those having a capacity for no more than 4 dwellings) will diminish to some degree. Apart from that, developable land within a district so environmentally constrained as Warrington is a finite resource and the likelihood is that historical rates of windfall/small sites provision could not continue in any event.

3.2.54 Thus, a more robust approach to the estimates from these sources is called for. My assessment is that, based on the various reduction factors suggested by Objectors, and given the Council's explanation of Warrington's own particular circumstances in this regard, the windfall allowance (50 units pa) should be reduced by 50% and the small sites allowance (30 units pa) by 10%.

3.2.55 In addition I note the Council now concedes that a reduction in the windfalls estimate is justified in order to take into account the overlap arising in respect of such development having been permitted before the operative assessment base-date but not being completed until during the first 1½ years from that time. Thus the calculation for provision between April 1995 and March 2001 actually needs to relate to a 4½ year period.

3.2.56 Also there is an issue concerning double-counting in relation to the Category G provision. Contrary to general guidance in PPG3 the Council's identified housing land supply does include a number of sites under 0.4 ha in size; these I am told have a total

outstanding capacity (that is, not completed at April 1995) of 129 units. Similarly the identified supply includes 134 units on sites of between 0.4 ha and 1 ha. Yet these units, it appears, have been included also as part of the total past provision from which the estimated future annual rates for small sites and windfalls respectively have been calculated. Thus the units yet to be built on these sites would contribute to the identified provision as well as, in theory at least, to the provision for unidentified small sites and windfalls. This, on the face of it, represents a clear case of double-counting.

3.2.57 The HBF and Satnam Investments Ltd call for an appropriate reduction to be made to the gross estimated figures for both small sites and windfalls. I disagree with that approach. A reduction of the scale suggested would, on top of the amended annual rate which I already intend recommending, result in an estimated provision so low as to be wholly unrealistic. It would certainly not represent the sort of figure which, on the basis of all the information there is on small sites/windfalls provision, might reasonably be expected from these sources during the remainder of the Plan period.

3.2.58 The following course of action is preferable. From the Council's HLA Statement I observe that almost all the sites which fall into the "double-counting category" are expected to be completed within the first 2 years after the April 1995 base-date. Thus by that stage the impact of the double-counting factor on the provision figures would have effectively ceased. Many sites in fact will have been built out by the end of the first year. As a compromise for the purposes of my assessment, I take the period of 1½ years as being the time when this particular problem is likely to be settled. In these circumstances it is both appropriate and reasonable, in estimating future small sites/windfalls provision, to take the annual rate over only what would then remain of the Local Plan period, namely 4½ years. So far as windfalls provision alone is concerned, the Council has already conceded that a reduction of this sort is justified, albeit for slightly different reasons.

3.2.59 Drawing the foregoing conclusions together I consider the Local Plan housing provision figures are as specified in the end column of the following schedule:-

Category A	as shown in the Proposed Changes	6574
Category B	as shown in the Proposed Changes	1331
Category C	296 (units under construction at April 1995) + 1298 (the number of units not started at April 1995, ie 1442, less 10% slippage)	1594
Category D	1326 less 10% slippage	1193
Category E	327 less 10% slippage	294
Category F	65 (Padgate Campus) + 325 (BRD as calculated in para 3.2.51)	390
Category G	small sites: 27 dpa (30 dpa less 10%) x 4½ years = 121.5 and windfalls: 25 dpa (50 dpa less 50%) x 4½ years = 112.5	234
<b>Total housing provision 1 April 1986 - 31 March 2001</b>		<b>11610</b>

3.2.60 On this basis there is a shortfall of 390 units against the Structure Plan requirement for 12000 new dwellings. Such a situation would be completely unacceptable and must be addressed as a matter of urgency. To this end I am, elsewhere in this report, recommending that 5 further sites should be allocated in the Plan for development, all but one of which would likely be exclusively for housing purposes. These are at Peel Hall Farm, Warrington [see paras 3.AS8.1 - 30], Well Lane, Penketh [see paras 3.AS1.1 - 23], Lakeside Road, Lymm [see paras 3.AS16.1 - 16], Rushgreen Road, Oughtrington [see paras 3.AS21.1 - 17] and Millers Lane, Oughtrington [see paras 3.5.170 - 176]. According to the respective Objectors who are seeking these allocations the sites will provide during the Plan period some 150 units at Peel Hall Farm (there is capacity for much more in the post-Plan period), about 100 units on each site at Lakeside Road and Rushgreen Road and 30 at Millers Lane; the Council does not dispute those figures. At Well Lane, based on the Objector's uncontested capacity estimate of up to 300 dwellings and given the general information presented about building rates, I consider that by 2001 this site could realistically deliver some 150 units.

3.2.61 Therefore the provision from these sites must be included in the Category (F) figure although in order to be consistent with the other estimates a 10% discount for slippage should be applied. The effect of this is to add a further 477 units to the total housing provision which as a consequence stands at 12087, a figure marginally above the strategic requirement.

3.2.62 I recognise that this provision may be regarded by some as inadequate and that arguably the Plan should aim for a greater margin above the strategic figure in order to provide a suitable measure of flexibility in the land supply. I am not convinced of this. First, there is some inherent flexibility in the CSP requirement itself in that it seeks about 12000 dwellings. Secondly, the slippage factor which I am recommending provides flexibility in terms of making allowance for contingencies which may or may not cause delays in housing coming forward as expected. Thirdly, although there is no dispute between the Council and the respective Objectors about the estimated capacity figures for the sites which I am recommending as additional allocations, these appear to have been based largely on the 20 dwellings per hectare notional density factor which the Plan adopts for the purposes of estimating the potential capacity of Areas of Search. For reasons explained later [see paras 3.3.32 + 33] I consider that a slightly higher density factor should be used in these calculations; correspondingly opportunities may arise for increasing the development provision from the additional allocation sites. While there is no need to rely on this for calculation purposes, it does represent a further element of flexibility in the overall provision. Fourthly, large windfall sites conceivably will arise just as they have done in the past; while, as PPG3 confirms, it would be improper to plan for them, these could add significantly to Warrington's land supply. These considerations reinforce my view that the housing provision figure which I identify above is entirely adequate for the purpose of meeting strategic requirements. The Policy LPS2 schedule which appears in the Proposed Changes should accordingly be modified to include my figures for the respective categories.

3.2.63 In addition I appreciate the argument raised by several Objectors that if recent completions rates (which have run ahead of the implied CSP rate) were to continue during the latter years of the Local Plan period then the demand for housing land in Warrington would outstrip supply. Yet in approving the CSP the former SSE expressly recognised that the strategic provision represented a substantial reduction in current housebuilding rates and



a significant shortfall against likely demand. The gradual reduction in the rate of development was identified as a consequence of the conclusion of the New Town role and also necessary in the longer term in order to take account of the constraints on development around Warrington. The former SSE expressly confirmed that while Warrington's housing (and employment) development rates should be monitored and reviewed at an early date, the approved strategic figure should hold for the purpose of preparing this Local Plan. Accordingly there is no compelling reason why the Local Plan should inflate the housing land supply well beyond strategic requirements purely as a response to perceived short-term demand.

3.2.64 It is also necessary to examine the housing land availability situation in the context of the PPG3 requirement for a continuing 5 years' supply. There is general agreement between the Council and various Objectors that the identified 5 years' supply will run out during the early part of the next decade. A few Objectors argue that the supply will not last beyond the current Local Plan period but my foregoing analysis demonstrates that this is not correct; a 5 years' supply based on the approved CSP requirement can be maintained within the operative term.

3.2.65 The Council claims that it can maintain an appropriate supply of housing land until such time (assumed to be mid 1999 or thereabouts) as it has been possible to undertake at least the partial preparation of its IUDP enabling, if necessary, Areas of Search to be brought forward to make further provision for housing. On this understanding the Council calculates that it has a 2.8 years' supply post 2001. This is based on a forecast of capacity for 1559 units being available between 2001-2004 derived from slippage of sites with planning permission, the residue of approved land at Bridgewater East, Local Plan allocations and an estimate of completions from windfalls and small sites. The average annual completions rate adopted is 557 dwellings which stems from the County Council's suggested policy requirement (in "Cheshire 2011") for the 1996-2011 period, but taking into account expected completions at April 2001. To my mind this methodology is sound, although for reasons which I shall shortly explain the actual calculations require adjustment.

3.2.66 Some Objectors insist that the annual completions rate factor for the post-2001 period should be based on current CSP requirements. I disagree. While PPG3 says in effect that the 5 years' supply calculation should be based on approved Structure Plan provisions, those provisions in the present case are strictly applicable to the 1986-2001 period. There is now clear evidence in "Cheshire 2011" that past implied rates are not expected to continue and this is consistent with the message in RPG13. Thus, for the purpose of the present exercise I consider it more appropriate when examining the post-2001 land supply picture to use implied completions rates derived from published draft strategic guidelines.

3.2.67 Indeed even this may prove to be an over-cautious approach given that the County Council has, since issuing "Cheshire 2011", resolved to reduce the overall requirement for Warrington quite appreciably, from 8800 to 7200 units. On the other hand I acknowledge the point made by some Objectors that definitive regional guidance on precise future housing provision is being reviewed and given the available information on the most up-to-date household projections, this may cause the strategic requirement for Warrington to be increased. All this though will doubtless be a matter for debate at the Structure Plan EIP.

It is not appropriate at this stage for the Local Plan to attempt to second-guess what the outcome might be.

3.2.68 On the foregoing basis my calculation of the 5 years' land supply is set out below. Most of the supply figures derive from my earlier conclusions and calculations or are the Council's uncontested estimates. However the figure for RAF Burtonwood requires explanation since this is the subject of an objection by the HBF. The circumstances of this site are described in detail in my conclusions on Policy LPS7. Clearly there is uncertainty about when this land is likely to come forward for development; however the Council remains confident that it will provide housing completions at a rate of 100pa from 2001 and the Defence Estates Organisation, on behalf of the site owners, appears from its evidence relating to that policy to be even more optimistic about a possible start date. While in all the circumstances I too have reservations about when realistically this site is likely to "deliver", there is no overwhelming evidence that the Council's forecast is unreasonable for the purposes intended. Here I have borne in mind the HBF's point regarding the proximity of the BRD land and the effects of the competition which that will present in terms of achievable building rates and marketing. Yet even if, for whatever reason, the first completions on RAF Burtonwood were to be delayed for, say, 2 years this would not have a serious impact on the overall calculations; for example, the years' supply figure (based on the period 2001-2004) would only be reduced by 0.35 at most.

Required completions rate (2001-2011):

Total housing completions April 1986 - March 1995 (according to Council's uncontested figures)	7905
Anticipated completions April 1995 - March 1996 (according to Council's uncontested figures)	1163
Anticipated completions April 1996 - March 2001) (12087 less 9068 - my forecast of provision to 2001 less the sum of the 2 above figures)	3019
Residual requirement 2001-2011 (8800 less 3019)	5781
Implied annual completions rate 2001-2011	578 pa

Housing supply (2001-2004):

Slippage from pre-2001 (Categories C, D and E of my forecast - 144+133+33)	310
Residual supply from Grappenhall Heys/Appleton Cross (slippage from pre-2001 subsumed in above 310 figure)	540
Residual supply from Local Plan allocated sites (BRD 3x100 pa, Padgate Campus 65 and RAF Burtonwood 3x100 pa)	665
Slippage from pre-2001 (from my recommended allocations)	53
Residual supply from Peel Hall Farm (assumed 100 pa x 3 years less 15 units already "counted" as slippage in above 53 figure)	285
Residual supply from Well Lane (slippage from pre-2001 already included in above 53 figure)	150
Windfalls/small sites (my recommended rate of 52 pa x 3 years less 33 units already "counted" as slippage in above 310 figure)	123
	2126

3.2.69 On this basis there would be a 3.68 years' supply of housing land post 2001. However I have taken this exercise a step further because I consider the Council's estimate of when it is likely to have progressed the IUDP to be over-optimistic. This conclusion is based on the fact that its anticipated programme for the remaining stages of this Local Plan (in particular the submission of my report) will inevitably prove to be wrong. The certain delay in adoption will correspondingly lead to delays in making effective progress on the IUDP.

3.2.70 Therefore I have taken the housing supply calculation another year forward. Several of the figures included in the schedule for the 2001-2004 period will remain unchanged. However by 2005 further provision can reasonably be expected from the 3 major sites still with residual capacity (BRD, RAF Burtonwood and Peel Hall Farm) and more windfalls/small sites can be anticipated. I have therefore added another 352 units (comprising 100 from each of the specified sites and 52 from the unidentified sources) to the earlier estimate of post-Local Plan housing supply to produce a figure of 2478 units for the 2001-2005 period. This represents a 4.29 years' supply based on the implied completions rate in "Cheshire 2011" for the remainder of the Structure Plan period.

3.2.71 These are fairly crude estimates only since both the available capacity figure and the implied annual completions rate are based on a number of assumptions. However for the present purposes these results demonstrate to my satisfaction that there would not, prior to the end of the Local Plan period, be such a significant shortfall (the term used in PPG3) in the likely 5 years' land supply requirement that yet further positive provision needs to be made in this Plan. I am content that before any such shortfall does arise the preparation of the IUDP would be sufficiently advanced to enable appropriate steps to be taken to make extra land available in order to meet whatever requirements may apply.

3.2.72 On the basis of the foregoing analysis of housing land provision, and on the assumption that my recommendations for the allocation of the 5 specified sites are adopted, I conclude that, in terms of the CSP requirement for Warrington and the Council's declared aim to maintain a continuing 5 years' land supply for a reasonable period beyond 2001, there is no overriding need to make yet further provision for housing land in this Local Plan. It is on this understanding that I shall consider all the objections which seek to promote the allocation of sites for housing development during the Plan period. The merits of individual sites are described elsewhere in this report under other policy headings.

3.2.73 For the avoidance of any doubt I would confirm that in reaching the foregoing conclusions I have taken into account the views expressed by other Inspectors in various Local Plan reports relating to other districts to which reference has been made by Objectors and the Council alike. It is not helpful to comment on those in detail however. In most cases there have been particular considerations that appear to have influenced the individual Inspector but which do not apply to Warrington's circumstances. Even in those instances where there seems to be a more direct relationship in the circumstances I prefer to rely on the evidence, of which there is an abundance, specifically relevant to this Borough. I am confident that the scope and nature of this material is such as to enable robust conclusions to be drawn albeit that these may not necessarily correspond with opinions expressed by other Inspectors elsewhere.

3.2.74 In respect of the sixth primary issue, **Peel Holdings plc** criticises the content of the revised policy and suggests a much briefer version which for the most part simply identifies the broad sources of housing provision without specifying their expected numeric contribution. This form of policy would not be acceptable. To my mind the first section of Policy LPS2 (as in the Proposed Changes), which identifies the strategic housing requirement and then goes on to explain how that figure will be achieved by reference to the categories of housing provision including their respective estimated contributions, is an informative and valuable part of the Local Plan. This represents the essential first step which the Plan takes in translating, as PPG3 requires it to do, the broad policies of the Structure Plan into more detailed policies and allocations. Subject to the modifications to the various specified estimates to which I have referred earlier, there is no reason to alter any other part of the initial terms of this policy.

3.2.75 However virtually all of the remaining policy text on the housing supply is superfluous. No purpose is served by listing individually all the sites which make up the various categories of permitted housing and, running as it does to some 4 pages, this makes the policy over-detailed and unnecessarily lengthy. This information (which in any event already appears in the published HLA Statement) could more conveniently and appropriately

be attached as an appendix to the Plan with a simple cross-reference to it included in the supporting text. The one exception to this criticism is the list of allocated sites; these of course arise for the first time by reason of proposals in the Local Plan and it is essential to collate them here for ease of reference.

3.2.76 In conclusion regarding Policy LPS2, I shall endorse the Proposed Changes version (LPS2-a) subject to the various alterations described above, together with the consequent changes to the Proposals Map (LPS2-b) against which there has been no counter-objection. My conclusion on Proposed Change LPS2-c is set out earlier [see para 3.2.21].

## RECOMMENDATION

3.2.77 That:

- (i) the Proposals Map be modified by the deletion of land to the south and west of Barleycastle Lane (and due east of the Local Plan employment allocation) from the Green Belt and by its allocation as employment land;
- (ii) the Proposals Map be modified by the deletion of land west of Taylor Business Park, Culcheth from the Green Belt and by its allocation as employment land in accordance with Proposed Changes LPS2-c and LPS5-c but further modified by the deletion of the copse area in the northern section of the proposed employment site;
- (iii) Policy LPS3 be modified by altering the specified size of Area of Search 22 to take into account the land described in (ii) above;
- (iv) Policy LPS2 be modified by the deletion of the existing policy wording and the substitution therefor of new wording in accordance with Proposed Change LPS2-a but further modified as follows:
  - (a) in the schedule of housing provision, in Category (c) add the words "APPLYING A 10% SLIPPAGE DISCOUNT TO THE NUMBER OF DWELLING-UNITS NOT ACTUALLY STARTED AT THAT DATE" and substitute in the end column the figure "1594"; in Category (d) add the words "LESS 10% SLIPPAGE FACTOR" and substitute in the end column the figure "1193"; in Category (e) add the words "LESS 10% SLIPPAGE FACTOR" and substitute in the end column the figure "294"; in Category (f) substitute in the end column the figure "867"; in Category (g) substitute in the end column the figure "234"; also delete all reference to the 2 calculations which appear below Category (g); and in the total expected housing completions item substitute in the end column the figure "12087";

- (b) in the section listing the sites comprising certain of the housing provision the paragraph beginning "INDIVIDUAL SITES CONTRIBUTING ...." and the subsequent headings and lists of sites under Categories (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) be deleted and substituted by:-

**THE SITES ALLOCATED FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE LOCAL PLAN AND CONTRIBUTING TO CATEGORY (f) ABOVE ARE AS FOLLOWS:-**

<u>Site</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Completions pre 2001</u>	<u>Completions post 2001</u>
PEEL HALL FARM	1100	135	965
BURTONWOOD REPAIR DEPOT	860	325	535
WELL LANE, PENKETH	300	135	165
PADGATE CAMPUS (PART)	130	65	65
LAKESIDE ROAD, LYMM	100	90	10
RUSHGREEN ROAD, OUGHTRINGTON	100	90	10
MILLERS LANE, OUGHTRINGTON	30	27	3

- (c) in the section on employment land provision the commitments figures be replaced by those derived from the 1996 Employment Land Availability Statement but reduced by 10.37 ha, the specified size of the area east of Stretton Green be amended to "16.5 ha" and the specified size of the area at Taylor Business Park be amended to take into account the deletion of the land described in (iii) above, and the total provision figure be adjusted accordingly;
- (v) the Reason and Explanation be modified by the deletion of the existing text and the substitution therefor of new text in accordance with Proposed Change LPS2-a but further modified as follows:

- (a) in the third paragraph under the heading "Land for Employment" delete the word "MODEST" and add as the concluding sentence "THE FOREGOING CONSIDERATIONS REPRESENT EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH JUSTIFY THE ALTERATION OF EXISTING DESIGNATED GREEN BELT BOUNDARIES IN THE MANNER PROPOSED.";
- (b) additional text be included drawing attention to the attachment to the Plan as an Appendix of the lists of sites contributing to the housing provision under Categories b, c, d, and e in the Policy LPS2 schedule;
- (vi) the Plan be modified by the attachment as an Appendix of the lists of sites described in (v-b) above;
- (vii) the Proposals Map be modified by the designation of additional sites as housing allocations in accordance with Proposed Change LPS2-b;
- (viii) no modification be made to the Plan in response to objections 6167 (Warrington Civic Society), 6247 (DoE), 5887 and 5888 (Villagate Properties Ltd), 11023 (North West Water Group plc) insofar as this proposes the allocation of land at Lingley Mere, Warrington for employment development under Policy LPS2, 11099 (Warrington Collegiate Institute), 11113 (Greenalls Group plc) and 16455 (Langtree Property Company Ltd).

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## **POLICY LPS3 : AREAS OF SEARCH - GENERAL POLICY PRINCIPLES**

**OBJECTIONS** - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (page 12)

### **Primary Issues**

- 3.3.1
- As a matter of principle, is there justification for the inclusion in the Local Plan of a policy aimed at safeguarding land for consideration for development in the post-Plan period or is there an overriding need to protect open land surrounding Warrington and its villages by designating it as Green Belt.
  - If there is such justification does the Plan safeguard sufficient land from which to make provision for necessary housing and employment development in the period beyond 2001.

- Irrespective of the "development needs" issue, does the Plan adopt an unnecessarily minimalist approach to its allocation of Areas of Search in that some land designated as Green Belt does not fulfil any acknowledged Green Belt purpose and could therefore more appropriately serve an Area of Search function.
- Should this policy include provision to enable safeguarded land to be released prior to 2001 if a proven need should arise for further housing and employment development which cannot otherwise be met.
- Should this policy specify the precise period over which the Areas of Search are intended to provide a reserve of land for possible future development purposes.
- Is it necessary to add a provision to ensure that Areas of Search could, in the longer term, be designated as Green Belt.
- Is the inclusion of the word "normally" in the policy text necessary and appropriate.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.3.2 As to the first issue, a **number of amenity groups and individuals** contend that there is no need, particularly at this early stage, to safeguard any land in the Borough for possible future development purposes after 2001. It is argued in effect that all presently open land outside of the built-up areas should be designated as Green Belt to ensure its proper protection in the longer term. A special plea is made by **Mr Hartley and the Oughtrington Community Association** in regard to Lymm which, it is implied, has already been overdeveloped and would, according to this Plan's proposals, be burdened with more than its fair share of Areas of Search, while the **Culcheth and Glazebury Action Group** maintains that the designation of all such Areas around these 2 specified villages is, on national policy grounds, objectionable in principle.

3.3.3 To my mind it is entirely right and proper that the Local Plan should include a safeguarding policy of this sort. The approach here is consistent with the guidance in PPG2 which confirms that local plan proposals affecting Green Belts should be related to a time-scale longer than that normally adopted for other aspects of the plan; the practice of safeguarding land which may be required for longer-term development needs is advocated.

3.3.4 The essential characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence; their protection must be maintained as far as can be seen ahead. Detailed Green Belt boundaries in Warrington Borough are being defined largely for the first time in this Local Plan and it is necessary to ensure that, once adopted, they will endure. I am satisfied that, subject to the modifications recommended in relation to Policy LPS2 and elsewhere in this report, this Plan will enable the Council to meet its recognised obligations to provide development land within the period up to 2001 and in the immediate short-term beyond. However given the evidence contained in RPG13 and "Cheshire 2011" about the County's likely future development



requirements, and the Council's admission of its responsibility to having to plan for meeting most if not all longer-term, locally-arising housing and employment needs, it is clear that some additional provision will have to be made in Warrington under the terms of the IUDP. For these reasons, and to enable consideration to be given at that time to the release, if necessary, of greenfield sites without prejudicing the integrity of the by then adopted Green Belt, the designation of Areas of Search in the manner now proposed is a thoroughly sensible approach for this Plan to take. Whether the total amount of land safeguarded in this way is too little or too much is a matter which I shall address shortly.

3.3.5 As to the particular concerns about Lymm, Culcheth and Glazebury, I deal with the merits of the individual Areas of Search later in this report. Suffice to say at this stage however, there seems to be no reason why any of these villages should, as a matter of principle, be discounted from consideration as a possible location for a safeguarding designation. PPG2 advises that such land should be located where future development proposals would, amongst other things, accord with the principles of sustainable development and have regard for environmental and technical constraints. There is no evidence to dispute the Council's claim that in general terms the distribution of Areas of Search around a number of villages, as well as on the fringes of the main urban area of Warrington, reflects that advice. This is particularly so in the case of Lymm and Culcheth which are the 2 largest villages in the Borough and should thus be potentially capable of accommodating in an acceptable manner a greater proportion of future development than smaller settlements.

3.3.6 There is also expressed by some Objectors a fear that Area of Search status would create undue pressure for the early development of the land so designated or that these sites would simply be allowed to degenerate thereby spoiling the local environment. While the condition of such sites is not something which the Local Plan could reasonably seek to control (indeed this would generally be the case irrespective of a site's designation), their future use and development are perfectly well covered under the terms of Policy LPS3 (as proposed for change) until such time as the IUDP decides otherwise.

3.3.7 As for **Cllr Black's** criticism that none of the proposed Areas of Search has been subject to proper environmental assessment, this has now been rectified. A full Environmental Appraisal of the Local Plan was carried out at the post Deposit Draft stage and this was taken into account by the Council during its detailed consideration of objections and its preparation of the Proposed Changes. In certain cases the findings of this Appraisal, coupled with my own assessment, have led me to conclude that individual Areas of Search are unacceptable; however there is nothing to suggest that the deletion of all such designations is justified as a matter of principle. Nor is there substance in this Objector's argument that Policy LPS3 breaches most of the Local Plan's own guiding principles. A balanced approach must be taken towards this, and indeed any other, policy. There may well be aspects of Policy LPS3 which could be described as inconsistent with one or more of the Plan's 17 specified guiding principles but this does not make the policy inherently bad. For the reasons advanced above, on balance I consider that the inclusion in the Plan of a safeguarding policy of this nature is entirely appropriate and worthwhile.

3.3.8 As to the second primary issue, a significant number of Objectors maintain that inadequate provision is made under Policy LPS3 to ensure that the Borough's perceived needs

for both housing and employment land in the longer term, post 2001, would be satisfactorily met.

3.3.9 It is important first to establish the meaning of "longer term" in Warrington's context. The Council interprets this as the period up to 2021. It sees this as the minimum term over which the Green Belt should be protected and over which its boundaries should remain unaltered. It has conceded however that circumstances may demand the reconsideration of these designated boundaries before that time, but in no event must they be altered before 2016.

3.3.10 There has been no serious challenge from those objecting to Policy LPS3 to the Council's concept of a 20-year Green Belt beyond the present Plan period. PPG2 specifies that such areas must be protected for as far as can be seen ahead; and that safeguarded land should be capable of serving development needs well beyond the Plan period. Given those considerations, and bearing in mind that this Local Plan will have only a very short formal lifespan from the time of its adoption, to my mind a 20-year term seems broadly right especially since the probable gestation period of the UDP which will cover the post-2021 years is bound to lead to questions being raised before that date over the future of certain Green Belt sites, even to the extent, as the Council concedes, of permissions for development being granted and building operations commencing on such land shortly before the operative period of the preceding Plan terminates. Only by aiming to ensure that designated boundaries can remain unaltered for as long as the Council now intends would the integrity of the Green Belt, and public confidence in it, be maintained. Even if boundary alterations were found to be necessary some time after 2016 this would not be completely unacceptable. The Green Belt would still have remained protected for in the order of 19-20 years from the time of adoption of the present Plan and approaching 25 years from its inception.

3.3.11 However in order to achieve these aims a reasonable understanding, at least, of future development needs is required. Regrettably there is no reliable strategic basis on which to assess with confidence Warrington's likely needs after 2001. In the circumstances RPG13 provides the appropriate starting point.

3.3.12 Turning first to the matter of housing provision, regional guidance specifies that in the 1991-2011 period an annual average of 3200 net additional dwellings should be provided in Cheshire. Yet even this figure must be treated with caution. This level of provision is calculated against the background of the former DoE's 1989-based household projections. However the corresponding 1992-based projections, issued in March 1995, provide a much more up-to-date assessment; these indicate that over the period 1991-2011 there will be a far greater increase in households in Cheshire (and in the Region as a whole) than had been envisaged in the earlier projections. In these circumstances the former SSE has asked the North West Regional Association of Local Authorities, in the light of whose advice RPG13 was prepared, to review the matter of dwelling provision taking into account the latest household projections.

3.3.13 Meanwhile "Cheshire 2011", the only relevant published strategic guidance (albeit a consultation document) on housing provision in the County beyond 2001, plans to provide for 47000 new homes in the period 1996-2011; this represents an annual rate broadly

in line with RPG13 guidance. In terms of distribution around the various districts, 3 options are suggested although in each case Warrington's contribution is set at 8800 dwellings. The Borough Council has resolved to resist this figure and proposes instead that its contribution should be 7000 dwellings. In response to this proposal the County Council, acknowledging that this Borough cannot continue to function as a focus for growth to the extent that it has in the past, has formally revised its own figure for Warrington and this is now set at 7200 dwellings. This level of provision will, I understand, appear in the Deposit Draft version of "Cheshire 2011".

3.3.14 Given all the foregoing circumstances, I am in no doubt that this latest strategic figure will be the subject of keen scrutiny at any forthcoming Structure Plan EIP and I will return to the matter of uncertainty regarding this figure later. However at this stage it does provide a useful basis on which to reach certain preliminary conclusions about the adequacy of the Areas of Search identified in the Local Plan. From the 15-year (1996-2011) requirement for 7200 dwellings the figure representing the estimated forward supply of housing land (excluding Areas of Search) must be subtracted. I calculate this as follows:

(i)	Anticipated completions April 1996 - March 2001	3019
(ii)	Anticipated completions from slippage on sites with planning permission at March 2001	310
(iii)	Residual supply from Grappenhall Heys/Appleton Cross	540
(iv)	Residual supply from Local Plan allocated sites: BRD (860 - 325 = 535), Padgate Campus (130 - 65 = 65) and RAF Burtonwood (500)	1100
(v)	Anticipated completions from slippage on my recommended housing allocation sites (Lakeside Road, Rushgreen Road and Millers Lane)	23
(vi)	Residual supply from my recommended housing allocation sites: Peel Hall Farm (1100 - 135 = 965) and Well Lane (300 - 135 = 165) - in each case including the anticipated completions from slippage	1130
		—
		6122

*[The calculations for the figures in (i), (ii) and (iii) are explained in more detail within the schedules in para 3.2.68, while in (iv) and (vi) the calculations of overall site capacity derive from the Council's uncontested evidence. The figure in (v) is explained in paras 3.2.60 and 3.2.61 as is the pre-2001 construction figure for each site in (vi).]*

3.3.15 In addition it is appropriate to include an allowance for windfalls/small sites provision over the period in 2001-2011. The Council suggests 100 completions per annum

based on its assessment of all such provision, including large windfall sites, over recent years. I have already concluded [see paras 3.2.53 - 58] that the Council's estimate of provision from these sources during the Plan period is over-optimistic. My criticism applies equally to the present exercise. As for the extra "large windfall site" dimension, it seems to be irrefutable that over a 10-year period some such sites would come forward. Recent historical evidence (1990/95) shows this to have been in the order of 245 units per annum. For the purpose of my present assessment, unlike the earlier much more exact calculation of the shorter-term land supply required to be made in relation to Policy LPS2 issues, there is no good reason to discount altogether provision from this source although any such allowance must necessarily be modest in comparison with the rates previously achieved in an era during which there was no adopted Local Plan. Given the foregoing circumstances I conclude that an appropriate allowance for all windfalls and small sites provision would be 65 units per annum.

3.3.16 I therefore find that in the 15-year period to 2011 it can be expected that some 6772 dwellings (6122 + 650) would be provided without any need to touch the Areas of Search. In relation to the latest strategic provision figure this leaves a shortfall of just 428 units. Consequently, based on the Council's notional density figure of 20 dwellings per hectare for estimating the potential capacity of Areas of Search, only some 21.5 ha of safeguarded land would need to be brought forward before 2011. In this connection I acknowledge that no such land is expected to be required for employment purposes during this period because the estimated forward supply, about which there is little significant dispute, already exceeds the strategic employment provision figure.

3.3.17 On the face of it therefore this is a fairly healthy situation. Given that under the terms of my recommendations regarding Policy LPS2 some Areas of Search (1, 8, 16 and 21) totalling 82.8 ha would be allocated for development pre-2001, the remaining Areas, as identified in the Proposed Changes, amount to 324.7 ha (this calculation takes into account the corrected area for Area of Search 13 which I am advised is 35 ha, a reduction of 7 ha from the figure given in the Plan). Thus, assuming for the purpose of this exercise that no other modifications are made to the Areas of Search quantum, this residual land supply, less 21.5 ha (the amount to be brought forward as described above) would be available to serve development needs in the 2011-2021 period.

3.3.18 Yet both housing and employment needs must be met from this supply. For Local Plan purposes the Council applies a ratio of 3:2 to apportion the land to housing and employment respectively; this reflects the recorded historical rate of development. On this basis, of the total residual supply of safeguarded land about 182 ha would be available for housing purposes post 2011.

3.3.19 Not surprisingly there is no information presently available as to what the strategic housing requirement post 2011 might be. However it is worth noting here the comments of the County Council. It had anticipated in "Cheshire 2011" that about 125 ha of the Areas of Search would remain available for development after 2011 and had expressed no dissatisfaction with that level of provision. Later, in formal submissions regarding the Proposed Changes in which a marginal net reduction in the overall amount of the post-2001 land supply is intended, the County Council stated that only a further reduction in the capacity of the Areas of Search would imperil the Borough Council's ability to accommodate

strategic requirements; and at that stage a provision figure of 8800 dwellings for the 1996-2011 period was still in prospect. The implication of these comments seems to be that the County Council believes that something marginally less than 125 ha would be adequate to provide the flexibility within which 10 years' post-2011 development requirements could be achieved. However such a proposition, involving as it would the acceptance of a remarkably low annual development rate, must be treated with extreme caution. Even so, it does help strengthen my opinion that solely on the basis of attempting to match potential land supply with perceived future housing needs, and assuming that the County Council's latest strategic figure survives the EIP, no significant additions to the Areas of Search are necessary. The following calculation illustrates this well.

3.3.20 If the present 7200 figure (or 480 per annum over 15 years) were to be extrapolated forward to cover the 2011-2021 period, 4800 dwellings would be required necessitating (at the Local Plan density rate) a supply of 240 ha. The expectation that 650 units would be found, as in the preceding 10-year period, by way of windfalls/small sites provision reduces the land supply requirement to 207.5 ha. Consequently there would, given the residual supply figure of 182 ha, be a shortfall of some 25.5 ha; or, in other words, the housing land supply would run out at around 2019/2020. While this is not a situation which should be deliberately planned for, it is not entirely unacceptable since by that time it might reasonably be expected that a UDP review addressing the post-2021 period would already be in progress; and it is some way beyond the 2016 date which can reasonably be regarded as the absolute minimum term over which Green Belt boundaries should remain unaltered.

3.3.21 However there are several other considerations, not least the uncertainty over the County Council's latest strategic figure, to which I have referred earlier, which must be taken into account. The intention of RPG13 is that Cheshire should base its housing provision principally on meeting its own needs. "Cheshire 2011" follows that guidance. Consequently the proposal is for a reduction in the rate of housebuilding from that allowed for in the CSP. Indeed, as for Warrington this is the continuation of the trend recognised by the former SSE in his approval of the CSP as being necessary in the longer term to take account of the Borough's constraints. The Council acknowledges that it must plan for a continuing rate of development that is capable of meeting most, if not all, locally-arising needs which, it is asserted, can be quantified as approaching 440 dwellings per annum (ie 55% of the CSP implied building rate). Yet this figure is largely conjecture it seems, based simply on broad assumptions about future household formations. The Council has undertaken no demographic analysis of what "locally-arising needs" might amount to (indeed nor, as I understand it, has the County Council).

3.3.22 **Wainhomes Ltd, Peel Holdings plc and the HBF** claim that the level of provision required to meet local needs should be based on calculations derived from the Chelmer Population and Housing Model. This identifies a requirement for about 9985 dwellings over the period 1996-2011 (or 665 units per annum). I am told this Model is used widely by the housebuilding industry and County Councils to test housing projections but I share the Borough Council's reservations about its value to the present analysis. In fact it was conceded by **Wainhomes**, the main proponent of Chelmer at the Inquiry, that this Model was not intended to be used as a precise method of establishing an exact figure for household projections in Warrington. In particular I observe that its use hitherto appears to have been concentrated on County projections rather than the more local level with which I am now

concerned. It is also a trend-based tool and in the present case reflects to an extent circumstances during an historical period of substantial induced growth and in-migration; a continuation of such a trend is clearly not something which RPG13 or "Cheshire 2011" contemplate. At best it demonstrates that, in the absence of an approved strategic requirement for the post-2001 period, it would be unwise to regard the County Council's latest revised figure as definitive.

3.3.23 **Dominium Properties Ltd** prefers to base its assessment on the former DoE's most recent household projection figure for Cheshire of 54000 and calculates that this Local Plan should make provision for an annual average building rate of 674 dwellings; the resultant shortfall up to 2007 is then identified. I consider there is no justification for this approach. This household projection figure is still under consideration by the Regional Association and has yet to be translated into regional guidance, let alone apportioned by the strategic planning authority to Warrington and the other Cheshire districts. Speculation, in such an exact manner as suggested here, on the possible outcome of such an exercise is not a helpful or reliable way for the Local Plan to proceed. However, as I shall shortly explain, the broader ramifications of the most recent population/household forecasts merit serious consideration.

3.3.24 **Peel** alternatively suggests that the assessment of post-2001 needs should be based on the extrapolation forward of the current CSP implied annual building rate, namely 800 dwellings per annum. I disagree. The clear message in the former SSE's approval of the CSP is of a need in the longer term to ensure a gradual reduction in the rate of development in the Borough in recognition of the constraints around Warrington. There is no evidence whatsoever that those constraints have diminished over time. Indeed, RPG13 is now saying much the same; it confirms that in Warrington and the rest of the Mersey Belt, whereas hitherto the strategy has been one of growth, the scope now for further expansion (beyond existing commitments) is limited by reason of the Mersey flood plain, mosslands and the need to preserve a sense of separation between existing settlements and the 2 conurbations. While this guidance also identifies opportunities which exist for modest development along the north/south and east/west transport corridors (the broad focal point of which is Warrington), there is no suggestion that acknowledged environmental constraints should be disregarded; a balanced approach is called for. Accordingly, to apply the CSP build rate, which is significantly greater than the level on which the County Council has now settled, is wholly unrealistic.

3.3.25 Several Objectors take an even more extreme view. They contend that the actual building rates achieved over recent years (up to 1995) should be used as a measure in forecasting future requirements. This is unreasonable and unrealistic. Those rates, averaging in the order of 880 dwellings per annum, reflect in part at least the legacy of committed and well-serviced housing land left from the era of the New Town Development Corporation. Now the period of induced growth is over. It is abundantly clear from recent regional and strategic guidance that the continuation of past development rates in Warrington is not an option for this Local Plan.

3.3.26 I do accept however that, bearing in mind the distinct possibility of regional housing requirements for Cheshire being increased due to the review which is called for in RPG13, the County Council may be compelled to revise again its own latest figures. The

Borough Council asserts that even this may not necessarily lead to an increase in Warrington's contribution under the new Structure Plan since any such additional overall provision might simply be apportioned to the other less environmentally-constrained districts in Cheshire. While that is a possibility, there is no evidence to suggest that it would be the most likely outcome. Certainly there is no indication that those other districts would welcome this prospect.

3.3.27 Accordingly for the Council to rely, which in effect it is seeking to do, on such a scenario is wrong. Any conscious attempt to limit the extent of the Areas of Search to a level which makes it inevitable that a noticeable measure of Warrington's local housing needs would have to be met elsewhere would, in the light of general regional and strategic guidance, be irresponsible. In these circumstances, and given that there is so much uncertainty about the estimated level of housing required to serve most, if not all, future local needs, it is essential that the Local Plan should provide for sufficient flexibility and choice regarding such provision to enable a reasonable range of possible strategic development requirements to be met and to enable some discretion to be exercised when the time comes to consider which Areas of Search should be brought forward. To achieve this I foresee 2 complementary courses of action which the Local Plan should adopt. First, more land should be safeguarded under Policy LPS3 and, secondly, the overall potential capacity of the Areas of Search should be re-evaluated on a more realistic and appropriate basis.

3.3.28 As to the first point, elsewhere in this report I am recommending that certain sites be allocated as Areas of Search (Stocks Lane extension, Clay Lane, land at Lymm north of the Bridgewater Canal, Rushgreen Road north, Thelwall Heys and Twiss Farm) and although correspondingly there are some which I say should not be adopted (Waterworks Lane, land at Glazebrook and the Warrington Road extension) the effect is to make a net addition of some 52 ha to the total amount of safeguarded land as provided for in the Council's Proposed Changes.

3.3.29 Regarding the second point, the Council makes 2 fundamental assumptions about the factors to which it has regard in assessing the adequacy of the proposed Areas of Search; namely that the land would be apportioned between residential and employment development on broadly a 3:2 ratio and that housing from this source would be at a density of 20 dwellings per hectare (dph). I have reservations about the validity of those assumptions.

3.3.30 The first of these factors derives from historical development rates in the Borough. It is necessarily a "global" figure and has been used in that way in the Areas of Search capacity assessment. Yet if consideration were to be given to this matter on a site-by-site basis I believe that a somewhat different picture would emerge. It is of course wholly inappropriate for this Local Plan to ascribe to the various Areas of Search particular land uses and I do not seek to do this. However even a superficial assessment of the identified and recommended sites convinces me that several, due to their limited size and close relationship with existing residential properties, are unlikely to be used for any significant employment development purpose. Certainly the evidence presented by Objectors who are seeking the pre-allocation of such sites as are proposed for safeguarding in the Plan, or who are themselves proposing Areas of Search which I am endorsing, fully supports this conclusion.

3.3.31 On the other hand there can be no serious dispute that Area of Search 22 would be suitable only for employment development [see para 3.AS22.7]. In these circumstances I am of the opinion that a ratio of, say, 3½:1½ would be a more realistic estimate of land apportionment in relation to all Areas of Search other than the site identified immediately above. The supporting text of Policy LPS3 should be modified accordingly. This would extend the potential capacity of safeguarded land for housing development and thereby introduce into the overall assessment a fair measure of flexibility. An additional consideration which lends further weight to this proposition is the evidence that there is already a substantial identified forward supply of employment land which exceeds by a reasonable margin the strategic requirement to 2011. I shall shortly deal with objections which bear on these particular provision figures but it seems clear to me that in the post-2011 period pressure for the release of Areas of Search for employment purposes is unlikely to be so great, in broad comparison with housing, as has been the case in the past.

3.3.32 Regarding the housing density factor, I agree with the view of the **Glazebrook Residents Action Group** (expressed as part of their case against Area of Search 13) that the notional figure of 20 dph appears to be highly subjective and, more importantly, unrealistically low. The Local Plan itself confirms that actual densities in areas used for housing would on average probably be closer to 25 dph. I accept the Council's argument that some allowance must be made for ancillary uses within housing areas such as open space, community and recreational facilities and landscaping, and also that in certain cases there could be technical or policy constraints on the level of development; however there are sound planning reasons for assuming, for the purpose of this exercise, that average densities would be greater than the Local Plan figure.

3.3.33 Most particularly, in planning policy guidance at all levels increasing emphasis is being placed on the need to respect the principles of sustainable development. In the present context this, to my mind, means planning positively to make the best possible use (subject obviously to environmental constraints) of those Areas of Search which of necessity are brought forward for development. Detailed consideration as to how this can be achieved in relation to any such Areas is properly a matter for the IUDP to address, but this Local Plan would be taking a significant, and entirely appropriate, step in the right direction if it were to promote a more ambitious density figure, at the very least as a means of demonstrating its commitment to the philosophy of sustainable development but, in more practical terms, helping to ensure that future pressure for the release of Green Belt land can be successfully resisted. For these reasons I consider that the Local Plan should specify the figure of 22.5 dph as the notional density for Areas of Search.

3.3.34 In my judgement the modifications which I intend recommending (namely the net additional Areas of Search, the revised housing/employment development ratio and the increased housing density factor) would collectively enable the Council to demonstrate with confidence that sufficient land has been safeguarded in the Local Plan from which to make adequate provision for a reasonable range of strategic housing requirements in the post-2001 period. The following calculations, using the same methodology as before, illustrate the eventual position. There would be a residual supply post 2011 from the Areas of Search of some 348.5 ha; this figure is derived from the Plan's overall safeguarded land supply adjusted to take into account my recommendations for the deletion and addition of sites (ie 324.7 + 52 [see paras 3.3.17 + 28]), discounting the contribution made by Area of Search



22 which I have earlier confirmed cannot reasonably be regarded as a potential source of supply for housing development, and subtracting a further 19 ha which is the amount of land required pre 2011 to meet the previously estimated housing shortfall (428 units) [see para 3.3.16] based on the 22.5 dph density factor. Apportioning this residual supply between housing and employment development on the basis of my recommended 3½ : 1½ ratio results in some 244 ha being available for housing purposes; and setting this against a supply requirement of 184.5 ha (ie 4800 dwellings over the 10 year period 2011-2021 less 650 achieved from small sites/windfalls [see para 3.3.20] at the notional density of 22.5 dph) discloses that at the end of this specified term there would be a surplus of about 59.5 ha from the Areas of Search. Or, expressed in another way, the potential housing land supply (13.2 years) for the second term would not run out until about mid 2024. Even if the strategic requirement were to revert to the "Cheshire 2011" figure of 8800 dwellings which is the basis on which many Objectors proceed, while there would be a shortfall of some 37.5 ha, the potential housing land supply (8.4 years) would last until about late 2019 which is comfortably outside the Council's declared minimum Green Belt time-horizon.

3.3.35 The Council, which continues to press for a strategic figure of 7000 dwellings, fears the prospect of an over-provision arising which it says would invite development pressure and unnecessarily compromise local environmental constraints contrary to strategic policy guidance. I do not share this view. Policy LPS3 (as proposed for change) makes it clear that unless and until a review of the Local Plan determines otherwise a policy of severe restraint, akin to that which applies to Green Belts, would be exercised over Areas of Search. Accordingly there is adequate protection for these Areas until such time as the Council itself, through its IUDP, decides that the need to make more land available for development should take priority.

3.3.36 There is much less argument about the adequacy of the Areas of Search to serve estimated employment development needs. A number of Objectors assert that the Local Plan makes insufficient provision but only a few attempt any detailed analysis. As with the housing needs assessment, it is convenient to reach a preliminary conclusion in relation to the County Council's latest strategic employment land provision figure for Warrington which is set at 240 ha for the period 1996-2011. The Council's evidence discloses that there is currently an identified forward supply of marginally over 280 ha. On the face of it therefore no safeguarded land should need to be brought forward prior to 2011 for employment development purposes. As for the estimated requirement from that date up to 2021, in the absence of any authoritative guidance it is again, as with the housing assessment described earlier, appropriate to assume that the same development rate would be set, namely 16 ha per annum; this would give a total requirement of 160 ha over the 10-year period the majority of which it seems would have to come forward from the Areas of Search.

3.3.37 For the purpose of the present exercise I have assumed that only two-thirds of the potential 40 ha surplus from the identified forward land supply would be available post 2011; the Council itself concedes that there is uncertainty over whether the full area of each identified site could be developed for employment purposes but I see no reason to discount this potential source of supply altogether. In addition account needs to be taken of the whole of Area of Search 22 which would be suitable only for employment use; any apportionment for housing development (as in the case of all the other Areas) is inappropriate. Thus the

amount of land potentially available from these sources totals some 36 ha leaving about 124 ha to be found from the remaining Areas of Search.

3.3.38 Using the same basic methodology as with the housing land calculation *[see para 3.3.34]* I find that there would be some 104.5 ha (the factor of 1½, or 30%, of the total residual supply of 348.5 ha) available for employment purposes post 2011. This represents a shortfall of about 19.5 ha against the identified requirement of 124 ha, or marginally over a single year's supply. This would not be an unacceptable situation. First, this shortfall would be more than off-set by the corresponding surplus of land potentially earmarked for housing (59.5 ha); secondly, the mitigating circumstances concerning the implications of the impending post-2021 UDP which I describe in relation to the housing assessment *[see para 3.3.20]* apply equally here.

3.3.39 Among those Objectors who have attempted a quantitative assessment **Linson Construction Ltd** and **Peel Holdings plc** calculate that there would be a shortfall in employment land provision of 28 ha over the 2001-2021 period; yet this calculation makes use of the 3:2 development ratio which I have already criticised and applies it to the global forward land supply figure thereby ignoring the fact that a significant proportion of that supply is identified/appropriate for employment development only. Consequently this does not represent a fair assessment.

3.3.40 **Peel** also claims the shortfall could amount to 37 ha. However this is based on an extrapolation forward of the original "Cheshire 2011" requirement for Warrington of 250 ha (1996-2011) which is no longer the County Council's preferred figure; and the calculation suffers the same drawbacks as the exercise described above. Alternatively it is suggested that a continuation of the present CSP rates be used in which case the alleged shortfall would be substantially greater. My observations about a similar claim by **Peel** in relation to the housing requirement assessment *[see para 3.3.24]* apply equally here.

3.3.41 **JK & JM Cross** on the other hand maintain that the future assessment to 2021 should be based on the continuation of actual rates of development which have been achieved over recent years. Again, my comments in respect of a similar claim regarding the future housing requirement *[see para 3.3.25]* correspondingly apply to this proposition.

3.3.42 These Objectors also argue the question of "need" on the basis of a qualitative point, as do **Messrs S and P Sinker** and **Arlington Securities plc**. Reference is made to draft regional guidance which stresses the need for the provision and protection of sub-regional employment sites, flagship sites and regional warehouse and distribution parks. None of the Areas of Search shown in the Proposed Changes document is said to possess the sort of characteristics required to meet that guidance; hence, more land should be safeguarded for those purposes.

3.3.43 This argument is unsound. It ignores the provision made elsewhere in the Local Plan (Policy ID6) for the designation of the Omega site which is safeguarded for future large-scale employment purposes. This site is of regional importance and is identified as such in the CSP (Policy EMP3) and in "Cheshire 2011". Thus, one of the types of provision which regional guidance is seeking (now described as "major inward investment sites" in the published version) is already being made in Warrington and there is no evidence to suggest

that any further allocations of land designed to serve a regional function need to be made in this Plan. Nor is there substance in Arlington's assertion that the Borough's own employment needs post 2001 cannot adequately be met from the Areas of Search as the foregoing analysis demonstrates.

3.3.44 In summary therefore, I am satisfied that, subject to the adoption of my recommendations allocating an additional net area of some 52 ha of safeguarded land and associated modifications to the development ratio and housing density factor, there is no demonstrable need to make yet further provision under the terms of Policy LPS3.

3.3.45 However there is one further matter which needs to be addressed. My attention has been drawn to a reference in the supporting material to "Cheshire 2011" giving the impression that the County Council is looking towards the year 2031 as being the time horizon of the Green Belt for current strategic and local forward planning purposes. No great weight should be attached to this at the present stage however. There is no definitive statement from the County Council regarding this point. Indeed it has raised no formal objection to the inclusion in the Local Plan of a statement of clear intent to regard 2021 as the operative minimum term for the Green Belt as proposed now for designation. Apart from that, I have already commented on the difficulties in assessing Warrington's likely development needs in the period 2011-2021 due to the absence of any regional and strategic guidance; any corresponding assessment covering a further 10-year term would, of necessity, be even more speculative. Any suggestion that the definition of the Green Belt and the allocation of Areas of Search in this Local Plan should take seriously into account the prospect of what in effect (ie from the deposit stage) would be a 37-year Green Belt is, on the basis of the evidence before me, completely untenable.

3.3.46 Regarding the third primary issue, the Council's general approach towards its identification of Areas of Search has been criticised by some Objectors as being too heavily environment-led. It is alleged that the objective has been to safeguard for potential future development the minimum amount of land possible and thence to designate as Green Belt all the remaining open areas irrespective of whether they actually fulfil any acknowledged Green Belt purpose. To an extent I have sympathy with these criticisms.

3.3.47 It appears that initially the Areas of Search were identified for the purposes of the Deposit Draft Plan on a fairly ad hoc basis without the benefit of any systematic, comprehensive analysis of all open land around the periphery of the town and villages which would have enabled environmental, sustainability and developability issues to be properly judged and compared. Subsequently however the Council undertook a full Environmental Appraisal of the Plan and this was incorporated at the Proposed Changes stage. As a result each of the Areas of Search has now been assessed on the basis of the same criteria, as have a number of the major sites suggested by Objectors for Area of Search status. However no comparative weightings have been applied to the results of the various tests; consequently the findings of this study cannot be used to identify how in overall terms the Areas of Search stand in relation to one another, or in relation to the various objection sites. And it follows therefore that their relative value as potential Green Belt land cannot be measured either.

3.3.48 The Council's statement that many of the Areas of Search could perform important Green Belt functions gives me further cause to question its approach to site

identification. There is no evidence in the Environmental Appraisal, or the rest of the Plan, which demonstrates why, if that is genuinely the case, these sites should have been designated as Areas of Search in preference to other open land which in the event has been proposed as Green Belt; or, alternatively, why certain of that "other land" should not also be designated as additional Areas of Search. Unless that is, the selection process was little more than the fairly random identification of sites sufficient in their total amount to meet what was perceived to be the minimum requirement to satisfy locally-arising development needs for the post-Plan period.

3.3.49 Nonetheless, despite those reservations I do not consider that a wholesale review of the land search exercise is called for. All of the Areas of Search, both those in the Deposit Draft Plan and those included in the Proposed Changes, are the subject of objections. In addition many other sites throughout the Borough are being promoted by Objectors as further candidates for safeguarding. I thus have the opportunity to judge the relative merits of all these Areas and sites and to assess whether their potential value, if any, as Green Belt land outweighs the need for them to be safeguarded.

3.3.50 In undertaking this exercise I have had regard to the guidance in PPG2 which sets out general criteria for the identification of safeguarded land broadly with the aim of promoting sustainable development; it also confirms that other policy, environmental and technical considerations need to be taken into account. The initial paragraphs of the supporting text to Policy LPS3 confirm that the Local Plan intends that much the same criteria should apply in the identification of Areas of Search.

3.3.51 My conclusions on individual cases are, for convenience, presented elsewhere in this report (under the specific Areas of Search references or Policy LPS5). As an overview however, I am satisfied that if sites are confirmed or newly included as Areas of Search in the adopted Plan in accordance with my recommendations then the criticisms about the general approach to the safeguarded land identification process will have been overcome. Provision would be made for sufficient Areas of Search to enable a reasonable range of potential strategic development requirements to be met from a choice of sites, while only such land as demonstrably fulfils a Green Belt purpose, and which of necessity should be kept permanently open, would be so designated. Thus, Warrington's Green Belt boundaries will endure.

3.3.52 As for the fourth primary issue, the express purpose of Policy LPS3 is to safeguard land for possible future development beyond the current Plan period. Moreover the Proposed Changes document includes additional policy text which confirms that permission for any such development would only be granted following a Local Plan Review (this being in effect the IUDP). This general approach is entirely consistent with the guidance in PPG2.

3.3.53 There is no justification in the proposal raised by **Messrs Harrison, McCarthy, Taylor and others, Mr Morris, Beazer Homes Ltd and Satnam Investments Ltd** that provision should be made within the terms of this policy for the early release (ie before either 2001 or a Plan Review) of Areas of Search if a need for further development land is proven and, as far as **Beazer Homes** is concerned, provided certain other site-specific criteria are met. In the main these objections are founded on the contention that there is

insufficient land identified for development (particularly housing) purposes within the operative life-span of this Local Plan either to meet strategic requirements or to achieve a continuing 5-years' land supply. For the reasons explained earlier in this report [*see para 3.2.72*] I am satisfied this is not the case.

3.3.54 National guidance makes it clear that the proper time to consider releasing safeguarded land is following a local plan review. To my mind, only by this means could a suitably comprehensive appraisal of all such land be undertaken against the background of the same information on housing/employment development needs, land supply and strategic policy requirements thus enabling decisions to be made on a comparative basis as to which Areas of Search (or parts of Areas as may be the case) should be released. The policy changes suggested by Objectors could easily lead to the ad hoc early release of some such Areas without the decision-maker having any proper opportunity to consider the respective merits of the other sites similarly identified in this Plan. That would be to deny the IUDP its rightful role in guiding the future planning of Warrington Borough and be inconsistent with the operation of a Plan-led system which national advice advocates.

3.3.55 For these reasons I endorse the basic terms of Policy LPS3 (ie setting aside the matter of the incorporated schedule of Areas of Search which is the subject of later consideration) and shall recommend the addition of the policy text included in the Council's Proposed Changes (part of LPS3-a).

3.3.56 As to the fifth primary issue, **Peel Holdings plc** argues that this policy should specify expressly that the identified Areas of Search are to provide a reserve of land from which longer-term development needs over the period 2001-2021 would be met. Corresponding changes to the supporting text are also put forward. Although the Council's objective has been to ensure that Green Belt boundaries designated in this Plan should endure until at least 2021 and that consequently the Areas of Search would in reality serve as a fund of land to help meet, if required to do so, development needs up to that date, to my mind there would be no benefit in, or purpose served by, the sort of policy change suggested by **Peel**.

3.3.57 The corollary of this suggestion seems to be that this Plan would be establishing a commitment that Warrington's Green Belt should be maintained for that specified term of years; yet PPG2 says that Green Belts must be protected for "as far as can be seen ahead". I am aware that the Deposit Draft Plan does include within its Green Belt policy (Policy LPS5) a firm commitment to protecting the designated boundaries until at least 2021. However in response to an objection from the former DoE the Council has agreed a Proposed Change (part of LPS5-a) deleting all reference to the specified date and substituting instead the descriptive term from PPG2 as quoted above. As a result the former DoE has conditionally withdrawn its objection. I intend endorsing this particular change [*see para 3.5.14*].

3.3.58 Given those circumstances, I conclude that **Peel's** suggested wording would render Policy LPS3 unduly prescriptive and would not align well with national guidance. Accordingly, no such modification to either the policy or its supporting text should be made.

3.3.59 In regard to the sixth issue, the **Culcheth & Glazebury Action Group** considers that further text should be added to this policy to ensure that any development which may exceptionally be permitted prior to 2001 should not prejudice the future redesignation of Areas of Search as Green Belt. This in my opinion is unnecessary. The sort of developments which Policy LPS3 makes provision for, namely agriculture, forestry, outdoor recreation and appropriate rural uses, are those which inherently would not prejudice any decision which the Council may wish to make in a future Plan to designate an Area of Search as Green Belt. In these circumstances the additional text sought by the **Action Group** would be superfluous.

3.3.60 The seventh issue concerns the provision that development will not normally be permitted unless it is essential for agriculture or other specified purposes. The inclusion of the word "normally" is said by the former DoE to introduce uncertainty into this policy and its deletion is sought. I agree. The Council has responded appropriately by deleting "normally" under the terms of one of its Proposed Changes (part of LPS3-a). This satisfactorily overcomes the objection and I intend recommending its adoption.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.3.61 That:

(i) Policy LPS3 be modified by the deletion from the final paragraph of the word **"NORMALLY"** and the inclusion of the additional sentence beginning **"PLANNING PERMISSION"** and ending **"SAFEGUARDED LAND"** all in accordance with Proposed Change LPS3-a;

(ii) the Reason and Explanation be modified by:

(a) the deletion from paragraph 6 of the reference to the housing/employment development ratio of 3:2 together with the associated text and calculation and the substitution therefor of the ratio 3½:1½ together with an explanation of its derivation in the following terms **"PREVIOUSLY OBSERVED RELATED LAND TAKE-UP RATES FOR HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT HAVE BEEN AT A RATIO OF APPROXIMATELY 3:2. HOWEVER IT IS LIKELY THAT MANY AREAS OF SEARCH WOULD, BECAUSE OF THEIR LIMITED SIZE AND NATURE AND THEIR CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH EXISTING RESIDENTIAL AREAS, BE APPROPRIATE ONLY OR PRIMARILY FOR HOUSING PURPOSES. FOR THIS REASON, AND GIVEN THE SCALE OF THE CURRENTLY IDENTIFIED FORWARD SUPPLY OF LAND FOR EMPLOYMENT PURPOSES, IT IS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREAS OF SEARCH OVERALL (BUT DISCOUNTING THE AREA ADJOINING TAYLOR BUSINESS PARK WHICH APPEARS TO BE APPROPRIATE ONLY FOR EMPLOYMENT**

DEVELOPMENT) WOULD BE "RATIONED" ON THE BASIS OF ABOUT 3½:1½ (HOUSING:EMPLOYMENT).";

- (b) the deletion from paragraph 12 of the reference to the notional housing development density of 20 dwellings per hectare together with the remainder of the first sentence and the substitution therefor of the density figure of 22.5 dwellings per hectare together with the following explanation "THE NOTIONAL DENSITY OF 22.5 DWELLINGS PER HECTARE HAS BEEN ADOPTED SINCE THE PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES SHOULD ACT AS A CATALYST FOR ACHIEVING INCREASED DENSITIES GENERALLY THEREBY MAKING THE BEST POSSIBLE USE OF AVAILABLE HOUSING LAND.";
- (iii) no other modification be made to the terms of Policy LPS3 or its supporting text in response to objections 5799 (Messrs Harrison, McCarthy, Taylor and others), 5855 (Peel Holdings plc), 5977 (Culcheth and Glazebury Action Group), 16419 (Mr Morris), 16444 (Beazer Homes Ltd), and 6082 and 11482 (Satnam Investments Ltd);
- (iv) no modification be made to the Plan in response to objections 4703 (Mrs Tomblin), 10965 (Oughtrington Community Association), 5633 (CPRE), 10986 (Culcheth and Glazebury Action Group), 6168 (Warrington Civic Society), 7570 and 16430 (Cllr Black) and 11518 (Mr Hartley).

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## POLICY LPS3 : AREAS OF SEARCH - INDIVIDUAL SITES

### Area of Search 1 - Well Lane, Penketh

OBJECTIONS:	O/04265/LPS3.1/02043	Mr K Foster
	O/04266/LPS3.1/02044	Mr David Naylor
	O/04267/LPS3.1/02045	B L Benson
	O/04268/LPS3.1/02046	Mr T D Long
	O/04269/LPS3.1/02047	Valerie Miller
	O/04270/LPS3.1/02048	K & V Barrett
	O/04271/LPS3.1/02050	Mr & Mrs Thornhill
	O/04272/LPS3.1/02051	Mr & Mrs R E Woodget
	O/04273/LPS3.1/02052	Miss N B Stafford
	O/04274/LPS3.1/02053	Mr & Mrs W Davies

O/04275/LPS3.1/02054	Mr C Webster
O/04276/LPS3.1/02055	Mr C Inman
O/04277/LPS3.1/02057	Ditchfield Farm Action Group
O/04279/LPS3.1/02058	Mr Fred Williams
O/04282/LPS3.1/02065	P R Langford
O/04284/LPS3.1/02066	Penketh Parish Council
O/04286/LPS3.1/02067	Mr George Warburton
O/04288/LPS3.1/02068	Mr H Fazakerley
O/04290/LPS3.1/02069	Mr Keith Doughty
O/05906/LPS3.1/02909	Beazer Homes Northern Ltd
O/05999/LPS3.1/02946	Mr K Ditchfield
O/06230/LPS3.1/02973	MAFF Land Use Planning Unit
O/07572/LPS3.1/03970	Cllr Peter Black

### Primary Issues

- 3.AS1.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on the need for open space and informal leisure facilities in Penketh, on the risk of flooding and on traffic safety and other infrastructure grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Does the acknowledged need to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land outweigh the justification for allocating this site as an Area of Search.
  - Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site and given the development land supply position, can its allocation for housing purposes prior to 2001 be justified.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS1.2 As to the first issue, the allocation site consists primarily of a large, open field. It is closely bordered on 2 sides by housing and there is a school adjacent to the northern corner; the extensive urban area of Penketh spreads to the north-east and north-west. The southern boundary is marked by a railway line alongside which is a canal; beyond is the River Mersey valley and open countryside. The relatively short south-western boundary is formed by a narrow lane and there is farmland further on.

3.AS1.3 Despite its size and nature, this site to my mind does not possess the characteristic of openness; at least not to the extent that it would make a useful contribution to the proposed Green Belt in terms of helping serve the acknowledged purposes of designation which PPG2 describes. The adjoining building development exerts a strong influence on the character and appearance of the allocation site and, together with the



significant boundary features on the southern side and the lane to the south-west, creates a noticeable sense of enclosure. This is in distinct contrast to the evident openness of the countryside to the south and west which the Local Plan designates as Green Belt.

**3.AS1.4** For these reasons I cannot agree with the views expressed by the **Penketh Parish Council** and numerous **local residents**. There is nothing of significance to warrant the inclusion of this site in the proposed Green Belt; the boundaries of the designated area in this immediate locality are firm and defensible and they should remain unaltered.

**3.AS1.5** Regarding the second primary issue, there is a strong local feeling that this Area of Search should be preserved in its open state. It is claimed that the availability of such space in Penketh is very limited, especially when compared with other parts of Warrington and that this site, given its location alongside the Mersey Valley corridor, represents an important informal leisure facility which currently many residents are able to enjoy. The Borough Council's research confirms that Penketh does indeed suffer from a shortage of open space provision when judged against adopted standards. However the allocation land is privately owned and public access to it seems to be confined to 2 footpaths. The Plan aims to help address the open space deficiency in this locality by protecting established green spaces (Policy OSR4) and identifying 3 Open Space Opportunity Areas (Policy OSR6) one of which involves a stretch of land directly north and east of this Area of Search alongside Well Lane/Hall Nook Road. In addition the Council itself intends eventually to lay out and landscape an area south of the nearby canal for recreational purposes, while any housing proposal for the site would, under the terms of Policy OSR1, be required to provide an appropriate amount of open space which would become available for public use. In all these circumstances it is clear that in reality the present open space position in Penketh would not be made noticeably worse if this Area of Search were to be developed. Given that factor, and in the absence of any evidence that this site might become available for public leisure use, I am convinced that the arguments raised by the **Parish Council** and **local residents** are unsound.

**3.AS1.6** So too are their claims about the risk of flooding and traffic problems. All of this site is within an identified flood plain but information from the National Rivers Authority confirms that this would not preclude development; it simply means that suitable protection/mitigation measures would have to be included as part of any proposal. Policy ENV10 covers this issue. Nor is there any firm evidence that insurmountable traffic problems would be likely to arise in the event of development being permitted. The Borough Council's unchallenged observations are that there is spare road capacity to accommodate the increase in traffic which would arise from some new development on this land, although various junctions in the neighbourhood would probably need to be improved; a detailed assessment would have to be undertaken at a later stage of the planning process in order to establish precisely the acceptable development limits. As for the alleged inadequacy of a range of other specified public facilities and services, notwithstanding that some of those mentioned are beyond the scope of proper planning considerations, there is simply no proof of this. In any event, as the Council points out, a prime purpose of the forward planning system is to enable the providers of facilities and services to plan ahead with confidence. In this respect I understand that key providers have been consulted in the course of this Plan's preparation and none has raised any objection.

3.AS1.7 On the third issue, about half of the allocation site area is Grade 2 agricultural land, while most of the remainder is Grade 3a. Thus it comprises almost entirely the best and most versatile agricultural land which, according to national guidance, should be protected and be developed only exceptionally. Regional and strategic guidance say essentially the same. MAFF objects to the Area of Search allocation on the basis of this guidance; so do several local residents.

3.AS1.8 This is a powerful argument against not only this particular allocation but also several other Areas of Search to which MAFF has raised a similar objection. In these circumstances it is appropriate to first consider this issue in the broader context. Given the totality of the evidence before me on housing/employment land provision, both for development within the current Local Plan period and for safeguarding for the years beyond, it is abundantly clear that if sufficient land is to be identified in order to meet known or anticipated strategic requirements then compromises will have to be made and greenfield sites will need to be either brought forward now or earmarked for possible longer-term use. And part of this compromise must be the attitude which the Plan should adopt towards the best and most versatile agricultural land.

3.AS1.9 The following considerations give strength to this conclusion. Some 33% of the total land area of Warrington Borough is already in non-agricultural/urban use; this is roughly twice the percentage for the rest of Cheshire. On the other hand the proportion comprising Grades 1 and 2 agricultural land (29%) is nearly 2½ times the level found elsewhere in the County; alternatively only 1% is within Grades 4 and 5. Regrettably the respective values for Grade 3a and 3b land are not known. Consequently on the basis of this, admittedly crude, analysis it appears that the likelihood of finding greenfield sites which are not of the highest 2 agricultural grades is significantly less in Warrington than in the rest of Cheshire. The same picture also emerges if the comparison is made with national figures.

3.AS1.10 In addition the Council points to the lack of readily identifiable alternatives to those sites allocated as Areas of Search in the Deposit Draft Plan (as proposed for change). Although for reasons explained elsewhere in this report I am recommending that further land should be safeguarded, from my consideration of all the identified Areas and other sites proposed by Objectors it is plain that potential future development land which is free, or largely free, from policy, environmental or technical constraints is in extraordinarily short supply.

3.AS1.11 PPG7 recognises that there may be circumstances in which the need to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land is outweighed by other considerations; for example when there is an overriding need for development, a lack of suitable opportunities in already developed areas and little lower-grade agricultural land is available. To my mind, given all the foregoing considerations those circumstances in general terms apply to Warrington. However the extent to which they might help justify the allocation of any particular Area of Search must form part of my overall assessment of the individual sites.

3.AS1.12 As for Area of Search I, I have already concluded that there are no sound Green Belt reasons for resisting the Plan allocation; nor are there insurmountable infrastructure constraints regarding its possible future development. Moreover, as I shall shortly describe when dealing with the fourth primary issue, there are a number of other

factors which weigh heavily in favour of the development of this site. The "agricultural land quality" argument thus stands alone in the present case. However against this is compelling evidence of a need to identify a significant amount of land for development as my overall conclusions on Policies LPS2 and LPS3 demonstrate.

3.AS1.13 Also the guidance in PPG3 calling for "a variety of sites in terms of both size and distribution" is particularly notable in the present case. This site is one of only two Local Plan allocations of potential development land on the western side of Warrington beyond the existing built-up area and no other, more suitable, sites have been proposed by Objectors. Therefore, on the basis that there would be benefits in identifying some development opportunities on this side of Warrington in order to provide a balance against those which the Plan proposes in other sectors of the Borough, and since virtually all the land between the urban edge and the western administrative boundary is provisionally classified by MAFF as being of the best and most versatile quality, it is inevitable in my opinion that some such land must be sacrificed.

3.AS1.14 For all these reasons I am satisfied that the preservation of this Area of Search for agricultural purposes is not justified and that no modification should be made to the Plan on these grounds.

3.AS1.15 Turning to the fourth issue, **Beazer Homes (Northern) Ltd and Mr K Ditchfield** contend that this site is entirely suitable in environmental and technical terms for development within the Plan period and that such an allocation would make an important contribution towards meeting the shortfall in the Borough's current housing land supply. The site referred to in this context includes not only the Area of Search but also the strip of land along the eastern and (part) northern sides which the Plan designates as an Open Space Opportunity Area within the Green Network.

3.AS1.16 On environmental grounds this is an outstanding candidate as a development allocation site. I have already explained how it is well contained physically and how its appearance and character are strongly influenced by the adjoining housing development. Furthermore this site lies at the edge of a substantial urban area to which it is well related in scale and its development would represent a logical and entirely acceptable form of rounding-off. It is not too distant from major employment areas in the north-western sector of the town and is within fairly easy reach, including by cyclists and pedestrians, of a range of local shops and services. There is also convenient access available by way of the same road system which already serves the nearby housing areas on to the main highway network. In terms of public transport facilities, the use of which national guidance seeks to encourage, there are established bus routes in the wider area; the site even adjoins the railway, and although as yet there is no station in the immediate vicinity the Council itself regards this as a locational benefit.

3.AS1.17 The objection land possesses no particular landscape qualities and the limited ecological/recreational value that it does have would, in the event of any development here, be well protected under the provisions of Local Plan Policies ENV5 and OSR7. **Beazer Homes'** arguments against those policies insofar as they relate to the present site are dealt with elsewhere in this report [*see paras 7.4.20 and 8.7.21 - 23*].

3.AS1.18 As for infrastructure and other technical considerations, the Council accepts that there are none which would prevent the development of this site being commenced within the Plan period. My earlier conclusions regarding particular matters raised by **MAFF, Penketh Parish Council** and **local residents** relating to agricultural land, open space, flooding, traffic and general facilities/services apply equally here. In this connection **Beazer Homes** and **Mr Ditchfield** raise a particular point about Policy ENV10 concerning the floodplain; I cover this under the specified policy heading [see para 7.7.4].

3.AS1.19 Given the foregoing circumstances, and against the background of national and regional guidance on the location of new housing, the relationship between transport and land-use planning and the need to respect the principles of sustainable development all of which finds expression in the CSP and the strategic objectives of this Local Plan, in my judgement the objection site has considerable merit. For that reason and given my conclusions under Policy LPS2 about the urgent need to improve the current housing land supply position for the remainder of the Plan period up to 2001 and in the immediate short term beyond, the case for allocating this site for development at the present time is overwhelming. Moreover, in forming this opinion I have not judged this site in isolation. In order to deal with this issue fully and equitably I have taken into account the respective merits of the other Areas of Search. However apart from nos 8, 16 and 21 which I am similarly recommending for immediate allocation none measures up to the Well Lane site.

3.AS1.20 There is no dispute between **Beazer Homes** and the Council that the site could accommodate some 300 dwellings; although, consistent with my conclusions about notional housing densities [see paras 3.3.32 + 33], I would encourage the parties to examine at a later stage of the planning process the scope for improving on this level of provision, in view of this agreement I see no reason to recommend formally at this time any higher capacity figure.

3.AS1.21 For purposes of clarification I would confirm that the development allocation should be confined to the land shown in the Plan as the Area of Search and not the whole site as described by the Objectors. This is to avoid any conflict with the Open Space and Green Network designations for the eastern edge of the objection site which I shall later be confirming. I recognise that if an access to the development site from Hall Nook Road were required it would need to cross this other designated land; however no evidence has been presented to suggest that this would be an unsurmountable problem in terms of the respective recreational and ecological policy aims. My recommendations are based on this understanding.

3.AS1.22 Lastly, in view of my conclusions about the acceptability of this site for development within the Plan period I shall not comment on the Objectors' alternative proposal that it should be identified as a priority post-2001 allocation.

## RECOMMENDATION

### 3.AS1.23 That:

- (i) the Plan be modified by the deletion from Policy LPS3 of Area of Search 1 and by the inclusion of this site instead as a development allocation under the provisions of Policy LPS2 with a specified capacity of 300 housing units;
- (ii) the Proposals Map be modified accordingly.

### Area of Search 2 - Stocks Lane, Penketh

OBJECTIONS:	O/01576/LPS3.2/00670	Cllr Mrs Sheila Woodyatt
	O/04278/LPS3.2/02057	Ditchfield Farm Action Group
	O/04280/LPS3.2/02060	Mr & Mrs R Wilkinson
	O/04281/LPS3.2/02061	Mr Paul Hawgood
	O/04283/LPS3.2/02065	P R Langford
	O/04285/LPS3.2/02066	Penketh Parish Council
	O/04287/LPS3.2/02067	Mr George Warburton
	O/04289/LPS3.2/02068	Mr H Fazakerley
	O/04291/LPS3.2/02070	Mr Ian Rice
	O/04292/LPS3.2/02071	T A Hamblett
	O/04704/LPS3.2/02322	Mr E J Barrow
	O/04705/LPS3.2/02323	J Smith
	O/04706/LPS3.2/02327	Mr & Mrs P Ireland
	O/04707/LPS3.2/02331	Mr H Crawford
	O/05554/LPS3.2/02833	Great Sankey Parish Council
	O/05780/LPS3.2/02870	Wilcon Homes Ltd
	O/05809/LPS3.2/02884	Mr Dan Bridge
	O/06231/LPS3.2/02973	MAFF Land Use Planning Unit
	O/07360/LPS3.2/03844	F P Bailey
	O/10897/LPS3.2/03970	Cllr Peter Black
	O/08290/LPS3.2/04517	F Knowles
	O/10791/LPS3.2/05481	Mr B E Balfe
	O/10792/LPS3.2/05482	Mrs S Balfe
	O/05759/LPS5/02864	Holgate Ltd
	O/10981/LPS5/02870	Wilcon Homes Ltd
	O/05810/LPS5/02884	Mr Dan Bridge

## Primary Issues

- 3.AS2.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on the need for open space and informal leisure facilities in Penketh and on traffic safety and other infrastructure grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Does the acknowledged need to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land outweigh the justification for allocating this site as an Area of Search.
  - Given the characteristics of this site, the likely need to provide major highways infrastructure in association with any significant future development and the requirement to establish a defensible Green Belt boundary, and having regard to the housing land supply position, can the extension of the identified Area of Search on to land to the south-west be justified.
  - On the basis of similar considerations is there justification for the allocation of all or part of this Area of Search, including the additional land as proposed above, for housing development prior to 2001.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS2.2 As to the first primary issue, this is an extensive stretch of open farmland on the western side of Warrington's main urban area. There is housing along almost the entire eastern site boundary as well as beyond the roads which define the northern limits of this Area of Search; the short southern boundary is also bordered by development. However to the west is open countryside which extends across the administrative boundary to the distant outskirts of Widnes. To my mind the allocation site, by reason of its scale and nature and its obvious close relationship with the land to the west, clearly has the appearance and characteristics of open countryside. In these circumstances it would be well capable of serving Green Belt purposes particularly in that it would help check the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area and assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; in addition it currently contributes to the separation between Warrington and Widnes.

3.AS2.3 However, contrary to the views of **Penketh** and **Great Sankey Parish Councils** and many local residents, I do not believe that this land should be formally designated as Green Belt. There are several reasons for this. My examination of the objections to Policies LPS2 and LPS3 demonstrates a clear need to identify considerably more land than the Local Plan intends both for development during the period up to 2001 and for safeguarding for the years thereafter. The Borough Council points to a lack of readily identifiable alternatives to those sites which it has allocated as Areas of Search and although for reasons explained elsewhere in this report I am recommending that further land should

be safeguarded, from my consideration of all the identified Areas and other sites proposed by Objectors it is plain that land for potential longer-term development needs which is free, or largely free, from policy, environmental or technical constraints is in extraordinarily short supply. Thus the deletion of any proposed Area of Search would have a particularly significant impact on the longer-term development land supply position.

3.AS2.4 On that understanding I agree with the Council's general approach that certain sites, even though they could serve a Green Belt purpose, should instead be safeguarded in order to ensure that an adequate reserve of such land is made available for future consideration for necessary development purposes. Also it is vital to identify a range of sites, in terms of their scale and distribution, so as to provide an appropriate measure of choice and flexibility when the time comes to decide on which Areas of Search should be brought forward.

3.AS2.5 The Stocks Lane allocation scores well on 3 counts. It is one of the few particularly large sites which either the Plan allocates or I am otherwise recommending; as such it makes, in terms of potential capacity, a significant contribution to the Plan's total provision of safeguarded land and it adds welcome variety to the range of sizes. Furthermore, importantly, as a result of my recommendation regarding Area of Search 1 it represents the only source of such land in the western sector of the town.

3.AS2.6 Additionally this Area of Search passes the "tests" set by PPG2 about the identification of safeguarded land. Given that there is already urban land effectively on 3 sides of this site, any development here could easily be well integrated with the existing built-up area. Also there are substantial employment areas which are not too distant and it is likely that some such provision would be included within any comprehensive proposals which may emerge for this site itself. In terms of public transport there is little evidence about the nature and scale of existing facilities close to this site, but I am aware that the nearby main radial routes into Warrington are the focus of bus services; moreover it seems inconceivable that for a development of the size which could potentially be accommodated here an appropriate level of services would not be provided, especially given the anticipated completion, in association with any such scheme, of the major highway network around this side of Warrington. Furthermore the presence of the main Liverpool - Manchester railway line across the allocation site provides the opportunity for considering the establishment of a road/rail interchange facility thereby further enhancing public transport prospects; I deal with objections about this particular matter later in this report under Policy T4. Also, as I shall shortly explain, there are no evident infrastructure or technical constraints which would prevent the development of the allocation land (subject to the distributor road provision) and no overriding agricultural land quality argument arises in this case. Nor are there any significant environmental or landscape considerations to address. In all the foregoing circumstances the allocation of this site as an Area of Search aligns favourably with the principles of sustainable development.

3.AS2.7 Finally on this issue, the continued exclusion of the allocation land from the proposed Green Belt would not seriously weaken the designated area hereabouts in terms of its ability to serve its acknowledged purposes. Even though the existing boundary between the urban area and this site is clear and defensible, there is no reason why an equally strong boundary, in Green Belt terms, could not be established on the western side of the Area of

Search. Indeed this is the Plan's intention since the boundary shown on the Proposals Map reflects the anticipated alignment of the major distributor road which would be associated with any significant development on the allocated land.

3.AS2.8 Some Objectors claim that the gap between Warrington and Widnes would be severely reduced. That would not be the case however. This Area of Search would extend no further westwards than do the existing built-up areas to the north and south; in any event the distance to Widnes' main urban edge is quite substantial and this gap would not be rendered vulnerable by reason of the Plan's proposal.

3.AS2.9 In all these circumstances I am satisfied that the potential value of this land as Green Belt is far outweighed by the advantages of allocating it as an Area of Search. I do however have some reservations about the precise alignment of the western site boundary; I shall return to this matter later [see paras 3.AS2.26 + 27].

3.AS2.10 Regarding the second primary issue, the argument raised by the **Penketh Parish Council** and local residents about the lack of open space provision in Penketh is the same as that voiced against Area of Search 1. Correspondingly, my conclusions there [see para 3.AS1.5] apply equally to the present case. Similarly the objections concerning the inadequacy of local services and facilities, and general infrastructure, are largely the same as before [see para 3.AS1.6]; there is no additional evidence to persuade me that the Stocks Lane site should not be safeguarded.

3.AS2.11 However on the matter of traffic safety/congestion the Borough Council acknowledges that Stocks Lane and other local roads are sub-standard. The solution to this is seen to be the provision of a district distributor road from the A57 in the north to the major roundabout on the A5080/A562 to the south. This would not only service any future development but also help relieve the pressure on existing local roads and complete the major highway network around the western side of Warrington. While this road does not appear in any adopted transportation programme, the Council is confident about being able to secure its provision in association with any significant development which may in the longer term be proposed here; I have no reason to believe that this confidence is misplaced.

3.AS2.12 As to the third issue, some 75% (31 ha) of this Area of Search is Grade 3a agricultural land. **MAFF**, **Great Sankey Parish Council** and a number of local residents object to the loss of such an extent of the best and most versatile land; the potential threat that further such land to the west would be prejudiced is also highlighted. My general comments on this issue are set out in my conclusions regarding objections to Area of Search 1 [see paras 3.AS1.8 - 11]. In relation to the Stocks Lane site I consider that the Borough-wide advantages of safeguarding this land for possible longer-term development and its particular suitability for this purpose, as described above, are sufficient grounds to outweigh the general need to protect agricultural land of this quality. As for the suggested risk that development on this site would lead to the loss of adjoining farmland, this should not arise. On the understanding that this adjoining area would become part of the adopted Green Belt as proposed in the Local Plan (and there has been no objection to that proposal), there would in future be a strong policy presumption against any development beyond the western boundary of this Area of Search.



3.AS2.13 In respect of the fourth primary issue, **Wilcon Homes Ltd, Mr Bridge and Holgate Ltd** submit proposals for various forms of extension to Area of Search 2. Each involves farmland to the south-west of the allocation site. **Wilcon's** proposal is the more modest in scale. It arises from an examination of the requirements for the distributor road referred to earlier. **Wilcon** maintains that a spur road connecting the new road with the A5080 (Farnworth Road) would be necessary to enable the nearby major roundabout to function properly. Technical evidence which supports this claim has not been challenged by the Council; nor have detailed plans showing the alignment of the distributor road, including the spur road, which have been submitted by this Objector. In these circumstances it is argued that the additional land which would be enclosed by the spur road, amounting to some 4 ha, should be included in the Area of Search allocation.

3.AS2.14 The Council's position is that while it readily acknowledges the appropriateness of adopting the distributor road alignment as the Green Belt/Area of Search boundary and notwithstanding that there is no dispute about the need for the spur on to Farnworth Road, it does not consider that the Area of Search should be enlarged in the manner suggested. I find this curious.

3.AS2.15 While the spur road would doubtless be constructed to a lesser standard than the distributor road, it would nevertheless be likely to have a noticeable impact on the appearance and character of its immediate surroundings. In short, it would create an obvious physical boundary leaving only a relatively small area of land which would be enclosed by roads on all sides and be contained also by development to the north and east (within the Area of Search) and housing to the south (fronting Farnworth Road); in addition the gardens of other residential properties along this road would border much of its western boundary.

3.AS2.16 In these circumstances the "enclosed" land would serve no useful Green Belt purpose. It would however represent a logical extension to the Area of Search and it should be allocated accordingly. This would have the added benefit of establishing a better relationship between the somewhat isolated pocket of housing on the southern side of Farnworth Road and the rest of the urban area and would, together with existing and envisaged physical features to the south and north respectively, create a continuous firm and defensible Green Belt boundary around this side of Warrington. Of course this additional allocation would also help improve marginally the potential longer-term development land supply position; however this has not greatly influenced my conclusions about the acceptability of **Wilcon's** proposal.

3.AS2.17 **Mr Bridge** also argues for the Green Belt/Area of Search boundary to be adjusted to take proper account of the distributor road alignment. He suggests 2 alternative boundaries each of which takes in much more land than that proposed by **Wilcon**; however no evidence is submitted to justify either of these alignments. It is merely asserted that these would allow for a properly designed distributor road to be accommodated. The suggested boundaries are thus completely arbitrary.

3.AS2.18 This is not an appropriate way for a Local Plan to proceed in defining a Green Belt boundary. PPG2 says that such boundaries should be clearly defined using readily recognisable features where possible. The line of a proposed road would in general terms be appropriate; but this would require at least a reasonable degree of certainty that any

alignment so defined is a realistic proposition particularly from a highway engineering perspective. In the absence of any satisfactory evidence, I have no confidence that the provision of the distributor road on either of this Objector's suggested alignments meets that test. No enlargement of the Area of Search is justified on these grounds.

3.AS2.19 Nor is there merit in **Holgate's** proposal. This involves a series of small fields on the northern side of Farnworth Road. While this includes the **Wilcon** land, the proposed Area of Search extends further west up to existing field boundaries. There is no suggestion that the Green Belt boundary in this vicinity should be contiguous with the alignment of any distributor road which may be proposed. The assorted field boundaries in question here are defined mainly by trees and hedges; overall this would present a very ragged edge to the Area of Search/Green Belt and this would not amount to the sort of definitive and defensible boundary which PPG2 calls for. In these circumstances no such modification to the Plan should be made.

3.AS2.20 However there is one point raised in this objection which has a bearing on my conclusions regarding **Wilcon's** proposal. **Holgate** seeks the exclusion from the extended Area of Search of the 4 dwellings north of Farnworth Road. This is inappropriate. Until such time as the IUDP decides otherwise a policy of restraint over development would apply to all Areas of Search. It is perfectly reasonable that this sort of control should be exercised over these residential properties for as long as they remain, as they are now, as relatively isolated dwellings largely surrounded by open countryside.

3.AS2.21 On the fifth primary issue, **Wilcon** proposes that a section of Area of Search 2, including the additional piece of land which I am endorsing, should be allocated for housing purposes within the Local Plan period. This is seen essentially as a free-standing development of some 200 dwellings served by the southernmost section of the distributor road and the spur to Farnworth Road although it could form the first phase of a much larger development if the IUDP were eventually to decide that the rest of this Area of Search should be brought forward.

3.AS2.22 **Wilcon's** case here is largely based on its assessment of the housing land availability situation for the period up to 2001. However for the reasons explained earlier in this report under Policy LPS2 I am satisfied that there is no need for any land at the Stocks Lane site to be allocated for housing under the provisions of this Plan.

3.AS2.23 It is also claimed that the certainty of development which such an allocation would provide would secure and facilitate the provision of the distributor road; this it is said would be widely beneficial. There seems to be no dispute that this road would play a much greater role than simply as a means of access to development on the allocation land. It would represent the missing link in the main highway network around the western side of Warrington and in particular would provide a much improved route from the south to the major employment areas in the north-west sector of the town. It would also enhance the prospects for the provision of a road/rail interchange, if this were deemed necessary, in association with any future development of this site. The Borough Council regards this road as desirable but not as a necessity in strategic terms. I am also told that the County Highways Authority has informally expressed support for the completion of this part of the

network. However there appears to be no authoritative recognition of this road's strategic value; it is not for example included in the current TPP.

3.AS2.24 I acknowledge that for the foregoing reasons the distributor road is only likely to materialise with the benefit of private funds as part of a development package. However the evidence presented does not convince me that the need for this road, both locally and strategically, is so pressing as to justify the release of any part of the allocation land for housing at this time. Given the environmental considerations described in relation to the first primary issue, the question of whether to bring forward this Area of Search in whole or in part should await the IUDP procedures when the need for additional development land and for the distributor road can be fully evaluated and judged against the merits of other such Areas.

3.AS2.25 Nor, for those same reasons, do I subscribe to **Mr Knowles'** arguments which call for the allocation of the entire site for residential development.

3.AS2.26 There is one further matter which arises from the evidence presented by **Wilcon** and the Council. The boundary of the Green Belt/Area of Search as defined on the Proposals Map is described by the Council as "generally representing the most reasonable alignment for the distributor road". However no technical design work has been done to give this statement credibility. On the other hand **Wilcon's** submissions include a detailed road proposal produced after expert analysis; the alignment shown differs marginally from the Area of Search boundary. The Council does not argue with this alignment. I also understand that, given existing highway design standards, there is little margin for any further variation.

3.AS2.27 It is vital that the Local Plan, in defining the inner edge of the Green Belt, uses the best possible information and analysis to ensure that the boundary which is eventually adopted is both realistic and defensible. This is not the case with the Plan's proposal as it currently stands. In these circumstances I urge the Council to reconsider the distributor road alignment with a view to establishing, as far as it is possible to do at this stage, its optimum position thereby enabling the Plan to define the most appropriate boundary for the Green Belt hereabouts.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS2.28 That:

- (i) no modification be made to the Plan in response to those objections proposing the designation of Area of Search 2 as Green Belt;
- (ii) the Proposals Map be modified by the deletion from the proposed Green Belt of land north of Farnworth Road and east of the spur road shown on Plan ADD2 of Doc 2870b accompanying objections 5780 and 10981 (**Wilcon Homes Ltd**) and its allocation instead as part of Area of Search 2;

(iii) the Council gives further consideration to the distributor road alignment in order to establish, as far as possible, its optimum position and, correspondingly, that of the western limits of Area of Search 2; and thereafter the Proposals Map be modified by redefining the Green Belt boundary along the western side of Area of Search 2 (taking into account (ii) above);

(iv) Policy LPS3 be modified by the deletion of the specified area for Area of Search 2 and the substitution therefor of the corrected figure arising from (ii) and (iii) above;

(v) no modification be made to the Plan in response to objections 5809 and 5810 (Mr Bridge), 5759 (Holgate Ltd) and 8290 (Mr Knowles) nor in response to objections 5780 and 10981 (Wilcon Homes Ltd) insofar as these propose the allocation of part of Area of Search 2 for housing development.

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### Area of Search 3 - Clay Lane, Burtonwood

OBJECTIONS - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (pages 13 - 17)

#### **Primary Issues**

- 3.AS3.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons based on traffic safety, social infrastructure, agricultural, environmental and ecological grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Should the southern boundary of this Area of Search be modified to align with existing field boundaries.
  - Given the housing land supply position and the characteristics of the site, is there justification for the allocation of this Area of Search for housing development prior to 2001.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS3.2 As to the first issue, this is a stretch of open arable land on the southern side of the village of Burtonwood. There is housing bordering the entire northern boundary of this site and also to the west, particularly beyond Clay Lane which is the main road leading out of the village towards the western parts of Warrington; there is farmland to the south and east.

3.AS3.3 At the Deposit Draft stage there was a substantial amount of objection to the allocation of this site as an Area of Search; **Burtonwood Parish Council, Burtonwood Environmental Group, Peel Holdings plc** and numerous individual local residents all sought the designation of this land as Green Belt. On reconsideration the Borough Council, as part of its Proposed Changes, deleted the original allocation and included this site instead within the proposed Green Belt. This has led to a counter-objection from **Wimpey Homes Holdings Ltd.**

3.AS3.4 I can well understand the reasons for so much local concern about the original allocation. This site, by virtue of its scale and nature and the absence of any significant natural boundary to separate it from the adjoining farmland, has the appearance and character of open countryside. As such it would be capable of performing certain Green Belt functions, not least that of helping to prevent Burtonwood and Warrington from merging. Indeed it is on this particular point that the Borough Council's own case for designating this site as Green Belt rests.

3.AS3.5 Yet despite those considerations I am not convinced that this site should be so designated. In my conclusions regarding Area of Search 2 I explain in general terms why certain sites, even though they could serve a Green Belt purpose, should instead be safeguarded for possible longer-term development [*see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4*]; those conclusions are especially pertinent to the present case. There are strong site-specific grounds too. The allocation land is closely bordered on 2 sides by housing. Thus when viewed from several vantage points, and in particular when approaching the village along Clay Lane, this site is seen against a backdrop of development which exerts an appreciable urbanising influence on these immediate surroundings; accordingly any perception of genuine openness is very limited. Correspondingly if this land were safeguarded, and in the longer term developed, any development would relate well to the adjoining built-up area and would tend to round-off the village rather than have the appearance of an encroachment into open countryside.

3.AS3.6 As for the gap between Burtonwood and Warrington, I recognise that this is already quite narrow; but if the allocation site were eventually to be developed the situation would not be made demonstrably worse. It would not for example bring the main body of development any nearer to the M62, which defines the northern limits of Warrington's established urban area, than is the existing housing off Clay Lane. Both literally and perceptibly the sense of separation would be preserved.

3.AS3.7 In reaching this conclusion I have taken into account the effect which future development at Limekiln, directly north of the M62, might have. In the Deposit Draft Plan this site is included within the proposed Green Belt. However under the provisions of Policy

ID7, which was introduced as part of the Proposed Changes, Limekiln has been designated instead as a Development Opportunity Area (DOA) for employment purposes. In essence the Council now argues that because the anticipated development at that location would have the effect of reducing the gap between Burtonwood and Warrington, the allocation of the Clay Lane site as an Area of Search can no longer be countenanced. This is a tenuous argument.

3.AS3.8 The Limekiln site, as it stands, is not open in appearance; it contains several massive buildings (former aircraft hangars) and is used extensively for the storage of vehicles. Therefore, irrespective of the implications of Policy ID7, its contribution to the extent of separation between Burtonwood and Warrington is limited. Indeed the Council itself says as much in evidence defending its case for allocating this as a DOA. Accordingly, the fact that Limekiln would be likely to become more intensively developed under the provisions of Policy ID7 would not reduce the effective width of the gap between these settlements by any noticeable amount. For these reasons I reject the assertion that the value of Area of Search 3 to the Green Belt has become significantly greater due to the changed status (in Local Plan terms) of the Limekiln site.

3.AS3.9 Similar considerations arise in relation to the gap between Warrington and St Helens. This is a much wider gap and is of more strategic importance but already it is interrupted by the significant presence of Burtonwood village. Area of Search 3 would, due to its nature and relatively limited scale, have no material impact on the sense of separation between these 2 major towns.

3.AS3.10 Given the foregoing considerations I conclude that the permanent protection of the Clay Lane site in its present open state is not essential; thus it should not be designated as Green Belt. Expressly therefore I do not endorse the Proposed Changes (part of LPS3-a and b, and LPS5-e). In reaching this conclusion I have taken into account the other fundamental argument raised by most Objectors, namely that this Plan proposal amounts to a radical review of the Green Belt. I disagree. The CSP defines only the general extent of the North Cheshire Green Belt. While the allocation site lies within the area so described, the former SSE in his approval letter confirms that it is the responsibility of the Local Plan to define the inner boundaries of the Green Belt; this is being done for the first time in this part of Warrington. In accordance with the advice in PPG2 Burtonwood, which is one of the larger settlements in this Borough where limited development and expansion is intended, is shown in the Plan as an inset village thus establishing the inner boundary of the Green Belt around this settlement. This is an entirely proper and logical step for the Council to take. In all the circumstances this course of action, and in particular the allocation of Area of Search 3, does not amount to a radical review of the Green Belt.

3.AS3.11 As for the second issue, a range of concerns are raised by the **Parish Council**, the **Environmental Group** and **local residents** but for the reasons now explained none amounts to compelling proof that the allocation site is unsuitable for safeguarding. Burtonwood is a sizeable village and a development of the scale which this Area of Search is potentially capable of supporting would not be inappropriate nor out of keeping. Regarding highway considerations, there is no technical evidence which demonstrates that roads in this area would be unable to accommodate safely the likely increase of traffic which any future development of the allocation site might generate. In terms of the possible impact of development on the established residential environment, there is no reason why any future

scheme could not be designed to ensure that the amenities of existing nearby residents would be respected. As for local facilities, there is a limited range of shops and services within fairly easy reach of this site by motorists, cyclists and pedestrians and there are also a number of employment opportunities in the village centre; additionally major employment areas in the north-western sector of Warrington are reasonably close. Also the Plan, in the spirit of promoting sustainable forms of development, anticipates that some appropriate employment provision could if necessary be made as part of a mixed use scheme for any Area of Search. Furthermore it includes Policy DC3 which would enable certain other social, community and recreational facilities to be secured where there is justification for extra provision in association with any future development proposal. In terms of agricultural land quality, this site consists of Grade 3b land; it is therefore not of the best and most versatile quality and consequently there is no conflict with planning policies on those grounds. I observe that MAFF has raised no objection in the present case. As for any public paths, trees, hedges and other natural features which are deemed worthy of protection, it should not be difficult for any future scheme to be designed in a manner which ensures their retention.

3.AS3.12 Of particular concern locally is the impact which any development proposal might have on the landscape of the village and associated nature conservation interests. I recognise that the **Parish Council** and the **Environmental Group** have on behalf of the entire community gone to considerable lengths to initiate and support a comprehensive landscape strategy for the village; much practical work has already been undertaken by local groups and individuals in accordance with the recommendations of the strategy document which was published in 1990. However, there is no reason why the continuing pursuit of the strategy's wide-ranging objectives and proposals should be seriously hindered by the development of Area of Search 3 if this were to occur in the longer term; and it follows that no significant damage in landscape, environmental or ecological terms need necessarily arise. In this regard I note that there is no national or local designation relating to landscape quality or nature conservation which applies to this site.

3.AS3.13 The landscape strategy expressly acknowledges the planning policy framework, including the provisions of this Local Plan, within which it has to operate. If by reason of proposals contained within the eventually adopted Plan parts of the strategy need to be rethought and adapted then that to my mind is an inevitable and quite proper course for a long-term landscape enhancement programme like this to take; it conceivably can, and perhaps should, evolve in tandem with the Plan which has the more far-reaching aims and responsibilities and there seems to me to be no reason why any resultant changes to the strategy should not prove to be just as beneficial to Burtonwood as the commendably ambitious proposals which are currently envisaged.

3.AS3.14 I am aware that in regard to none of the foregoing points does the Borough Council concur with the fears expressed locally. Indeed it is quite clear to me that within the Local Plan there are various policies which would enable the Authority to ensure that any future development proposal would not lead to the sort of problems which the **Parish Council** and others have identified.

3.AS3.15 Turning to the third primary issue, the Green Belt/Area of Search boundary defined in the Deposit Draft Plan is a purely arbitrary one which is not related to any physical feature on the ground. **Wimpey Homes** suggests that as far as possible this boundary should

instead align with existing field boundaries. I agree. Even though these consist only of sparse sections of hedgerow and a few trees they at least represent a more appropriate and sensible alignment for Local Plan purposes. The easternmost stretch of the Green Belt/Area of Search boundary would still of necessity cross a field and, in the light of PPG2 guidance on the subject, this is unfortunate; however there is no evident alternative. In the longer term, should the allocation site be brought forward for development, this boundary could easily be landscaped and reinforced and thus be made even more clear and defensible than it currently is.

**3.AS3.16** A consequence of this boundary realignment is that the overall size of Area of Search 3 increases marginally and this should be recorded in the Policy LPS3 schedule of sites.

**3.AS3.17** Regarding the fourth issue, my analysis under Policies LPS2 and LPS3 of the development land supply position, both during the remainder of the current Plan period and in the longer term beyond, demonstrates that there is no need to allocate this site for housing at the present time; strategic requirements can be satisfactorily met from other more acceptable sources either already identified/allocated in the Plan or recommended by me for adoption. Equally however there is clear evidence that the availability of suitable land for safeguarding is limited. On that understanding, and given my conclusions on the first and second primary issues in this case, it is plain that the Clay Lane site would make a valuable contribution to the reserve of land from which longer-term development needs could if necessary be met. Given those considerations I shall not endorse Wimpey Homes' proposal that this site be allocated now for residential development.

## RECOMMENDATION

**3.AS3.18** That:

(i) no modification be made to the Plan in response to those objections proposing the designation of Area of Search 3 as Green Belt, nor in relation to Proposed Changes LPS3-a (part) and LPS3-b (part) insofar as these relate to this site, or LPS5-e;

(ii) the Proposals Map be modified by the realignment of the southern boundary of Area of Search 3 in accordance with the plan (Appx B) in Document 2891b accompanying objections 5823 and 11043 (Wimpey Homes Holdings Ltd);

(iii) Policy LPS3 be modified by amending the specified size of Area of Search 3 to 8.6 ha to take into account (ii) above;

(iv) no modification be made to the Plan in response to objection 5823 (Wimpey Homes Holdings Ltd) insofar as this proposes the allocation of Area of Search 3 for housing development.



## Area of Search 4 - Phipps Lane, Burtonwood

OBJECTIONS - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (pages 18 - 22)

### Primary Issues

- 3.AS4.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on traffic safety, social infrastructure, agricultural, environmental and ecological grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Given the housing land supply position and the characteristics of the site, is there justification for the allocation of the eastern section of this Area of Search for primarily housing development prior to 2001.
  - On environmental grounds can the extension of this Area of Search on to land to the south-west be justified.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS4.2 Regarding the first primary issue, this site comprises largely open land on the western fringe of Burtonwood village. However along the northern boundary is a short ribbon of housing and business premises which front on to Back Lane. Beyond that is open land including school grounds. To the east and south is almost continuous development, while on the western side is extensive farmland with a complex of farm buildings directly alongside the south-west boundary.

3.AS4.3 Despite the strength of opposition to the allocation of this land as an Area of Search from the **Burtonwood Parish Council**, **Burtonwood Environmental Group** and a considerable number of local residents, I am not convinced that there are sufficient grounds to justify its designation instead as Green Belt. While the allocation site, by reason of its size and nature, is essentially open in character, the extent of development which borders it on 3 sides, coupled with the substantial belt of trees along the fourth boundary, creates a noticeable sense of enclosure. As such there is, in terms of character and appearance, a distinct difference between this site and the open countryside both to the west and to the north beyond Back Lane; and that road and the tree belt provide a clear division on the ground.

3.AS4.4 For these reasons I do not share Objectors' views that this land is a significant feature of the gap between the village and the outlying parts of St Helens; nor would the more strategically important gap between Warrington and St Helens be materially affected by safeguarding this site for possible longer-term development particularly given the already substantial presence of Burtonwood itself within the stretch of countryside which separates

these 2 towns. Correspondingly, if development were eventually to be permitted here it would be reasonably well contained and would not appear as an encroachment into open countryside; close integration with the established built-up area could easily be achieved. In summary, while this land in its current state provides a fairly attractive edge to the village and consequently in local terms has an environmental value, I am not convinced that it performs any appreciable Green Belt function.

3.AS4.5 Overall, given the foregoing circumstances and my earlier comments generally about the need to identify certain sites for safeguarding notwithstanding their Green Belt potential [see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4] and my rejection of the argument about radically reviewing the designated area around Burtonwood [see para 3.AS3.10], the Borough Council's decision not to designate the land now in question as part of the proposed Green Belt is fully justified.

3.AS4.6 As to the second issue, the arguments raised by the **Parish Council**, the **Environmental Group** and **local residents** are to a large extent the same as those identified in their objections to Area of Search 3; my conclusions on those particular points [see paras 3.AS3.11 - 14] apply equally here. As for additional matters of concern, while there are some potentially "noisy" industrial and social uses close to the present site, there is no compelling evidence that these would prove to be an insurmountable problem if housing development were in the future proposed for this Area of Search; in this respect the Local Plan includes policies designed to protect the amenities of future (as well as existing) residential occupiers. Nor are there sound reasons for believing that if new shopping provision were made here then established village shops would suffer; the likely content of any future scheme is at this stage pure conjecture and the question of retail impact can only be addressed when such details are known and in the light of circumstances then prevailing. For all these reasons, and bearing in mind the guidance in PPG2(Annex B), to my mind this site is an entirely suitable candidate for safeguarding under Policy LPS3.

3.AS4.7 In respect of the third primary issue, a significant part of the case argued by **Northern Trust Co Ltd** concerns the alleged inability of the Local Plan to meet strategic housing requirements and its inflexibility in terms of choice of location for development. However my analysis under Policies LPS2 and LPS3 of the development land supply position, both during the remainder of the Plan period and in the longer term beyond, demonstrates that there is no need to allocate any part of this Area of Search for housing at the present time; strategic requirements can be satisfactorily met from other more acceptable sources either already identified/allocated in the Plan or recommended by me for adoption.

3.AS4.8 Nor are the additional site-specific arguments which are raised by this Objector in favour of the immediate release of the eastern section of the allocation land at all persuasive. In terms of character and appearance there is little to distinguish this part from the remainder of the identified Area of Search. It is obviously slightly closer to the main built-up area of the village but, given my earlier conclusion about the extent of containment which the whole allocation site enjoys, that in itself does not make the eastern part any more suitable for development than the rest. As for the boundary between these 2 sections there is a hedge and some mature trees but these amount to nothing of great significance.

3.AS4.9 **Northern Trust** refers to several other factors in support of immediate allocation for housing. I accept that development of the eastern section would relate well to

the established pattern of building; that the village has a reasonable range of shops and services; that employment opportunities are within easy reach; that good public transport provision is readily available, and that a site of this size would widen the choice and distribution of housing land and would enable a good mix of dwelling types to be achieved. Yet all these attributes apply equally to the rest of this Area of Search and, importantly, they amount to just as strong a case in support of the Local Plan proposal to safeguard the whole site for future consideration.

3.AS4.10 In summary, therefore, there is nothing to justify treating the eastern and western sections differently for forward planning purposes. As I have previously explained under Policy LPS3 the availability of suitable sites for safeguarding is limited and in all the circumstances Area of Search 4 in its entirety should remain as part of the Plan's identified reserve of such land.

3.AS4.11 Turning to the final issue, Northern Trust calls for the exclusion from the proposed Green Belt of a small area of land which adjoins this Area of Search to the south-west. This comprises a group of farm buildings and some arable land. It is argued that these buildings, which are no longer in full use, relate well to the existing built-up area and that this site as a whole serves no Green Belt function; if this were incorporated into the Area of Search it would enable the village fringe, in the event of development occurring, to be dealt with in a more sympathetic and suitable fashion.

3.AS4.12 These arguments are not convincing. Buildings of the style and nature of those here are not uncommon features of the countryside and certainly in a village fringe location like this they do not appear out of place or environmentally damaging. In my opinion the objection site overall relates closely, both visually and physically, to the extensive area of open land which adjoins it to the north-west, west and south and in Green Belt terms makes a useful contribution to the role which this stretch of countryside plays. Also, significantly, the Green Belt boundary as defined in the Local Plan is logical, firm and defensible following as it does the route of a conspicuous tree-lined track and, for a short length, Clay Lane. In contrast the boundary which the Objector suggests, being largely defined by a combination of hedged or fenced field boundaries and the walls of various buildings, would be much more haphazard and fragile.

3.AS4.13 I accept the Objector's point that, in terms of accessibility to village shops and other facilities, employment areas, public transport services and so on, this site scores just as well as the identified Area of Search. However if it were added to that Area and eventually developed it would represent a noticeable encroachment of the village into this sensitive countryside fringe causing harm to the character and appearance of these immediate surroundings; this consideration is paramount when measuring the suitability of the objection land for safeguarding. In my judgement its value to the proposed Green Belt is overwhelming and accordingly no modification to the Local Plan should be made.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS4.14 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to the listed objections.

## **Area of Search 5 - Burtonwood North**

**OBJECTIONS** - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (pages 23 -27)

### **Primary Issues**

- 3.AS5.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on traffic safety, drainage, social infrastructure, agricultural, environmental and ecological grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Given the housing land supply position and the characteristics of the site, is there justification for the allocation of the southern section of this Area of Search for housing development prior to 2001.

### **Inspector's Conclusions**

3.AS5.2 As to the first issue, this is a substantial area of mainly open farmland stretching across the entire northern side of Burtonwood village. There is however a small group of dwellings and mobile homes fronting Lumber Lane which forms the northern boundary and elsewhere within the site is a farm cottage. Beyond Lumber Lane is open countryside with the urban edge of Newton-le-Willows visible in the distance. Along the western side is Green Lane. The opposite frontage is developed with a ribbon of housing and a school, while the area behind those properties is generally open apart from a few scattered dwellings and the hamlet of Collins Green. The remaining boundaries of the allocation site are contiguous with the fairly heavily built-up edge of the village.

3.AS5.3 **Burtonwood Parish Council, Burtonwood Environmental Group** and a considerable number of **local residents** all argue that the allocation land should be included in the Green Belt; **Peel Holdings plc** makes the same point. Their argument is understandable. I recognise that this site, by reason of its scale and nature, is essentially open in character and as such it makes a notable contribution to the sense of separation which there is between Burtonwood and Newton-le-Willows; also, in its present state it serves to contain the village and prevent its outward spread into the wider countryside fringe. For these reasons this land is clearly capable of serving acknowledged Green Belt purposes. However the case for excluding it from the proposed designated area and safeguarding the site instead for possible longer-term development purposes is persuasive.

3.AS5.4 The allocation land is flat and featureless. From many public vantage points it is viewed against a backcloth of development around the northern edge of the village and the tight ribbon of buildings which extends along the entire western side of Green Lane. In these circumstances, despite the inherent openness of this site it is not particularly well related

to the much more extensive stretch of rural countryside beyond Lumber Lane. This road represents a clear division between these 2 areas of distinctly contrasting character and appearance.

3.AS5.5 Moreover if in the longer term the allocation land were developed no demonstrable harm, in Green Belt terms, would necessarily arise. Plainly Burtonwood would expand quite substantially; but not in an uncontrolled fashion. Any new development would be adequately contained by the Green Lane housing and by Lumber Lane so there need be no reason to fear yet further sprawl into the more sensitive countryside beyond. Those features represent firm and defensible boundaries for the Green Belt. Also, while the gap between the village and Newton-le-Willows would be reduced, this would not to my mind be critical. Already the housing in Green Lane, which tends to consolidate around the junction with Lumber Lane where other dwellings front this main road, and properties at the north-easternmost tip of Burtonwood extend noticeably into the perceived gap between the body of the village and the nearby town. Area of Search 5 effectively fills the space between these 2 spurs of housing. Consequently development on this land would not reach into the area of genuine open countryside which in reality creates the sense of separation which it is vital to preserve.

3.AS5.6 There is also much local concern about the gap between Burtonwood and Collins Green. However again the Green Lane housing already has an appreciable impact on the perception of true space between these settlements; development on the allocation land would in effect be behind those properties and would not therefore worsen the situation greatly. My conclusions regarding the likely effect on the strategic gap between Warrington and St Helens are precisely the same as those rehearsed in relation to Areas of Search 3 and 4, as are my views on the argument about radically reviewing the Green Belt around Burtonwood [*see paras 3.AS3.9 + 10*].

3.AS5.7 In addition my earlier comments concerning the general approach which needs to be taken in examining the suitability of sites for safeguarding [*see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4*] are especially relevant to the present case. The Burtonwood North allocation is one of the few large sites which either the Plan identifies or I am otherwise recommending; as such it makes, in terms of potential capacity, a significant contribution to the Plan's total provision of safeguarded land and it adds welcome variety to the range of sizes and general distribution of such sites.

3.AS5.8 This allocation also meets the guidance in PPG2 about the identification of safeguarded land. Given that there is development already effectively on 3 sides of this site its integration into the existing built-up area should be easy to achieve in any future scheme. There appear to be good prospects for employment opportunities; there is an industrial estate in the village and the major employment areas in the north-west sector of Warrington are not too distant. In terms of public transport provision there is evidence before me that bus services to and from Burtonwood are reasonably good. Furthermore as I shall shortly explain there are no apparent infrastructure or technical constraints which would prevent development of the allocation land; nor is there any overriding agricultural land quality argument in this case and no insurmountable environmental or landscape problems arise. In these circumstances the allocation of this site as an Area of Search aligns favourably with the principles of sustainable development.

3.AS5.9 For all the foregoing reasons I am convinced that the value of this site as part of the reserve of safeguarded land far outweighs any potential contribution which it might be able to make to the Green Belt hereabouts. Accordingly, on these grounds no modification to the Plan is warranted.

3.AS5.10 As to the second primary issue, the **Parish Council**, the **Environmental Group** and numerous **local residents** raise a variety of points to support their contention that the allocation site is unsuitable for development. Many of those matters I have already addressed in relation to Areas of Search 3 and 4; my conclusions there on traffic safety considerations, impact on local residents' amenities, accessibility to shops and services, availability of employment opportunities and the relationship with proposals contained in the Burtonwood Landscape Strategy apply with equal force on this occasion [*see paras 3.AS3.11 - 14*].

3.AS5.11 Some other points require further comment however. Obviously the allocation land has the potential to accommodate development on a substantial scale. Yet it seems to me that given the configuration of this site and its close relationship with the body of the village and the housing along Green Lane, development here would be capable of being absorbed satisfactorily into the built-up area without harming seriously the environment of these surroundings or Burtonwood's identity. Much would depend on the eventual design and form of any proposed scheme and this is a matter over which the Borough Council would be able to exercise suitable control at the appropriate time. Fears have been expressed particularly about the existing village centre becoming redundant in the event of such large-scale development occurring. On the contrary, if this were properly and sympathetically planned, in principle I see no reason why the established shops, services and other facilities should not reap the benefits of the resultant increased population and potential demand.

3.AS5.12 As for the matter of agricultural land quality, about half of this site is Grade 3a land which is the lowest classification of the best and most versatile range; the remainder is even less significant. Given my earlier conclusions on this matter in general [*see paras 3.AS1.8 - 11*], I am satisfied that there is no overriding basis for objection in the present case. Indeed PPG7 confirms that where there is a proven need for the development of agricultural land of the best and most versatile quality then the preference should be for Grade 3a land to be taken. Finally I observe that MAFF has raised no objection to this particular Area of Search allocation.

3.AS5.13 Regarding drainage considerations, there is no compelling evidence that any future development on the allocation site could not be properly serviced. There are Local Plan policies aimed at ensuring that appropriate infrastructure would be provided in such circumstances; Policy DC1 is especially relevant in terms of this objection issue.

3.AS5.14 The remaining point of local concern is the effect of the Plan proposal on the scenic value of the long distance footpath which passes through the village. Clearly the environment in the immediate vicinity of this site would change in the event that development were to take place here but if treated sympathetically the impact need not be unacceptable; for example Policy OSR3 makes specific provision for the enhancement of public footpaths with a view to safeguarding users' interests. In any event this is only a relatively short stretch of a long route a section of which already crosses or adjoins built-up parts of the

village. To my mind the overall value of this pathway would not be seriously diminished. No modification to the Plan is therefore justified on these grounds.

3.AS5.15 On the third primary issue, **Charles Halton Builders Ltd** contends that there is insufficient building land available in the Burtonwood village area in order to meet local requirements; accordingly the allocation of one section of this Area of Search for housing prior to 2001 is sought. The Local Plan however must address the question of housing land provision on a Borough-wide basis. PPG3 confirms this. On this understanding I have analysed under the terms of Policy LPS2 all the available evidence on the overall land supply position and am satisfied that there is no need, based on strategic requirements, for any part of the allocation site to be brought forward during the Local Plan period. No additional evidence of local demand is submitted by this Objector.

3.AS5.16 Nor are there any site-specific reasons for agreeing to **Halton's** suggestion. The land in question is simply part of a large field with nothing to distinguish it, and no boundary to divide it, from the remainder of the identified Area of Search. Consequently it would be wholly illogical to treat this section of land any differently.

3.AS5.17 **Halton's** alternative proposal is that the Plan should give priority to bringing this part of the allocation site forward in the post-2001 period. Again however there is no reason, on housing need or site-specific grounds, why this Area of Search should not be considered for possible longer-term development in its entirety, as Policy LPS3 intends, along with all other such Areas in a proper and comprehensive manner at one time as part of the IUDP process.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS5.18 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to the listed objections.

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### Area of Search 6 - Waterworks Lane, Winwick

OBJECTIONS:	O/01571/LPS3.6/00667	Mr W H Walker
	O/04711/LPS3.6/02338	Mr J D Parr
	O/05545/LPS3.6/02831	Winwick Parish Council
	O/06214/LPS3.6/02971	North West Water Limited
	O/06232/LPS3.6/02973	MAFF Land Use Planning Unit

## Primary Issues

- 3.AS6.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Does the acknowledged need to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land outweigh the justification for allocating this site as an Area of Search.
  - Should the south-easternmost section of this Area of Search, by reason of its appearance and use, be included within the Winwick village inset.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS6.2 In respect of the first issue, this site lies on the north side of the small village of Winwick and for the most part comprises open, arable land. However a small area in the south-eastern corner is used by North West Water Ltd for operational purposes; at the time of my inspection building and associated engineering activities were in progress, these being part of permitted proposals for an extension to the adjoining water treatment works. To the east and west the allocation site is bordered by Waterworks Lane and Golborne Road but beyond these features, and to the north, is open farmland.

3.AS6.3 The major part of this site is, due to its nature, appearance and absence of any significant boundary treatment, virtually indistinguishable from the farmland which largely surrounds it. As such it possesses the clear characteristics of open countryside and to my mind it would make a valuable contribution to the proposed Green Belt around this village. If the present land were safeguarded as the Local Plan intends, and in the longer term developed, demonstrable harm would be likely to arise; it would have the appearance of an uncontrolled sprawl of development encroaching into this countryside fringe and would tend to reduce the gap between the main body of the village and the distant easternmost outskirts of Newton-le-Willows. At present the built-up area of Winwick is compact and generally well defined. The Plan proposal would substantially extend the village in an illogical and inappropriate fashion and would leave the Green Belt hereabouts with a weak and potentially indefensible boundary.

3.AS6.4 I have taken fully into account the development land supply position for the years beyond 2001 as reported under Policy LPS3 but, notwithstanding my earlier comments about the general need to safeguard a certain amount of land for the longer term [*see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4*], cannot agree with the Borough Council's view that an Area of Search allocation is justified on this occasion. The need to protect this site permanently in its present open state is paramount and accordingly it should be designated as Green Belt as suggested in essence by **Winwick Parish Council, Mr Parr and Mr Walker**.

3.AS6.5 For the avoidance of any doubt I would confirm that the foregoing conclusion relates only to the main part of the site which is in agricultural use; I deal with the remainder, the waterworks operational land, under the terms of the third issue.



3.AS6.6 As to the second primary issue, most of the allocation site is Grade 3a agricultural land; the rest is classified as Grade 3b. In the light of national guidance regarding the need to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land, which includes Grade 3a, MAFF asks that Area of Search 6 be confirmed only if there is no feasible alternative. The Parish Council and Messrs Parr and Walker express their objection on these grounds more forcibly although the first 2 of these Objectors mistakenly believe this land to be of Grade 1 quality.

3.AS6.7 My comments regarding this issue in general are set out in my conclusions on objections to Area of Search 1 [see paras 3.AS1.8 - 11]. In the present case since there are compelling reasons on Green Belt grounds for deleting the Area of Search allocation it follows that the "housing need" argument no longer arises and accordingly there is nothing to justify setting aside what is in effect a policy presumption against developing agricultural land of this quality. While this in itself provides no basis for designating this site as Green Belt bearing in mind that according to PPG2 to retain land in agricultural use is not a material factor in the inclusion of land within a Green Belt, it does support my earlier conclusion about the unacceptability of the Plan's safeguarding allocation.

3.AS6.8 Turning to the third issue, I have already explained how the waterworks operational land in the south-easternmost section of the allocation site is completely different in character from the rest. Indeed, given its appearance and use, the clear impression is that it forms an integral part of the built-up area which extends directly to the south and west. Also, I understand there is no reasonable prospect of this piece of land becoming available for housing development since it is required for continuing operational purposes; therefore the safeguarding allocation would be of no effect in any event.

3.AS6.9 In these circumstances the proposal by North West Water Ltd that this section of the identified Area of Search be included instead within the Winwick village inset is entirely sensible. This would bring it into line, in planning policy terms, with the remainder of the adjoining fairly extensive waterworks property. I shall recommend accordingly.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS6.10 That:

- (i) the Plan be modified by the deletion of Area of Search 6;
  - (ii) the Proposals Map be modified by the designation of land between Waterworks Lane and Golborne Road (currently shown as the major part of Area of Search 6) as Green Belt and by the inclusion of the area of waterworks operational land (currently shown as the south-easternmost section of Area of Search 6) within the Winwick village inset.
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**Area of Search 7 - Myddleton Lane, Winwick**

OBJECTIONS: O/01572/LPS3.7/00667 Mr W H Walker  
O/04712/LPS3.7/02338 Mr J D Parr

**Conditionally Withdrawn**

O/01573/LPS3.7/00668 Mr F K Bryce  
O/05546/LPS3.7/02831 Winwick Parish Council  
O/06233/LPS3.7/02973 MAFF Land Use Planning Unit

**Primary Issues**

- 3.AS7.1 ● Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, and the agricultural quality of the land, is there justification for its allocation for safeguarding purposes or should it instead be designated as part of the Green Belt.

**Inspector's Conclusions**

3.AS7.2 This is an area of arable land lying to the north of Winwick village and directly south-east of Area of Search 6. In response to the listed objections the Council, as part of its Proposed Changes, deleted the allocation of this land as an Area of Search and now designates it as Green Belt. Although 2 objections remain outstanding, these changes on the face of it satisfactorily answer all of those which were originally submitted. However there are certain points arising from those objections which I find it necessary to address in order to explain my reasons for endorsing the Proposed Changes.

3.AS7.3 The Council's sole argument for deleting this Area of Search and designating the land as Green Belt is that because this site comprises almost entirely Grade 1 agricultural land any future case for development would be most unlikely to be justified. While this is a reasonable enough basis for not safeguarding this site under Policy LPS3, it does not justify the "replacement" Green Belt designation; my reasons are explained earlier [see para 3.AS6.7] in making the same point in relation to Area of Search 6.

3.AS7.4 It is necessary to demonstrate that this site is able to serve one or more of the acknowledged Green Belt purposes. In this respect to my mind the allocation land possesses the same characteristics and enjoys the same intimate relationship with the open countryside surrounding Winwick as Area of Search 6; hence the justification for including this within the proposed designated area is just as strong as in that case [see paras 3.AS6.3 + 4]. It is on this basis that I support the Proposed Changes (part of LPS3-a and 3-b, and LPS5-f) relating to this site.

## RECOMMENDATION

### 3.AS7.5 That:

- (i) the Plan be modified by the deletion of Area of Search 7 in accordance with Proposed Changes LPS3-a (part) and LPS3-b (part);
- (ii) the Proposals Map be modified by the designation of land at Myddleton Lane, Winwick as Green Belt in accordance with Proposed Change LPS5-f.

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### Area of Search 8 - Peel Hall, Winwick

<p>OBJECTIONS:</p>	<p>O/04708/LPS3.8/02333  O/04709/LPS3.8/02336  O/04710/LPS3.8/02337  O/04713/LPS3.8/02338  O/05547/LPS3.8/02831  O/06007/LPS3.8/02948</p> <p>O/06081/LPS3.8/02955  O/10493/LPS3.8/05275  O/10494/LPS3.8/05276  O/10495/LPS3.8/05277  O/10496/LPS3.8/05278  O/10497/LPS3.8/05279  O/10498/LPS3.8/05280  O/10499/LPS3.8/05281  O/10500/LPS3.8/05282  O/10501/LPS3.8/05283  O/10502/LPS3.8/05284  O/10503/LPS3.8/05285  O/10504/LPS3.8/05286  O/10505/LPS3.8/05287  O/10506/LPS3.8/05288  O/10507/LPS3.8/05289  O/10508/LPS3.8/05290  O/10509/LPS3.8/05291  O/10510/LPS3.8/05292  O/10511/LPS3.8/05293  OPC/11483/LPS6/02955</p>	<p>B Lloyd  Mrs A McDonald  Mr A G Naylor  Mr J D Parr  Winwick Parish Council  Federation of Cheshire Green Parties  Satnam Investments Ltd  Mr &amp; Mrs S O'Riordan  Mrs J M Collier  M Humphreys  Mr &amp; Mrs L D Jennings  Mr &amp; Mrs Skelhorne  G R Dickenson  Mr R Higham  Mr &amp; Mrs D Hewitt  Mr B G Roughley  F G &amp; J Rigby  Mr &amp; Mrs D Wood  Mr A C Hammond  Mr R Mawdsley  Mrs J Harrison  Mr F Shoebridge  G D Harrop  C A &amp; M J Ryan  Mr I T &amp; J A Wright  Mr B Kennerly  Satnam Investments Ltd</p>
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Conditionally Withdrawn  
 O/10991/LPS3.8/02969  
 (reported under T14)

Highways Agency (Northern  
 Network Management Div)

### Primary Issues

- 3.AS8.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons based on the need for open space and recreational facilities in this locality and on ecological, agricultural and traffic safety grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site and given the housing land supply position, can its allocation for development prior to 2001 be justified.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS8.2 In regard to the first issue, this is an extensive area of open land on the northern fringe of Warrington. Dense, urban development surrounds this site on 3 sides, while the remaining boundary is formed by the M62 motorway. Beyond that is a stretch of open countryside with the village of Winwick a little further on. A small parcel of woodland lies centrally within this Area of Search and is linked to Radley Common at the southern edge; the Local Plan allocates these areas as part of the Green Network under Policy OSR7.

3.AS8.3 **The Federation of Cheshire Green Parties and local residents** expressly ask for this Area of Search to be included in the Green Belt; in essence **Winwick Parish Council** says the same but proposes specifically that such designation should apply to the woodland and common as well as an adjoining part of this site which it describes as a nature reserve.

3.AS8.4 The allocation land, due to its sheer scale and nature, clearly possesses the characteristic of openness. However to my mind that alone is not enough to justify its inclusion in the Green Belt. Despite the extent of this site, the environment of this immediate area is strongly influenced by the neighbouring housing development; from most vantage points the presence of the surrounding properties within this landscape is inescapable and this has a noticeable urbanising effect. The same consideration applies to the motorway. These features combine to create an obvious sense of enclosure around this site which accordingly, in terms of character and appearance, is distinctly different from the area of countryside (designated by the Local Plan as Green Belt) to the north. Indeed the motorway represents a very clear division between these 2 contrasting areas and it provides the most logical and defensible boundary for the Green Belt hereabouts.

3.AS8.5 For all these reasons I am convinced that the allocation site would be incapable of serving usefully any of the acknowledged purposes of including land within a Green Belt and there is accordingly no basis for modifying the Plan in the manner these Objectors propose.

3.AS8.6 Those conclusions apply with equal force to the areas of land with which the **Parish Council** is especially concerned. All are surrounded by the Area of Search and/or urban development and therefore are completely unrelated to the expanse of open countryside north of the motorway. In these circumstances a Green Belt designation cannot be justified. The **Parish Council's** fears that these areas would be under threat from development are in any event groundless. The woodland and Radley Common, being identified as part of the Plan's Green Network, are thereby already subject to protective policies; as for the additional area, even though there is no convincing evidence of its value in ecological terms, any such interest which there may be could, in the event of development being proposed here, be given appropriate consideration under the provisions of other Plan policies.

3.AS8.7 As to the second primary issue, the **Parish Council** and many local residents regard this land as an important open space which provides both a recreational and general amenity for the surrounding population; reference is also made to the wildlife value of the whole Area of Search. There seems to be no dispute that this site is quite widely used for walking and other informal, low-key recreational purposes and inevitably, having apparently been left uncultivated and neglected for some time, its natural regeneration has enabled flora and fauna to become better established.

3.AS8.8 Yet this I am told is private land over which the general public has no right of access except for along the routes of 2 footpaths. Moreover for the most part it lies within a neighbourhood sector of the Borough which the Council's unchallenged evidence demonstrates has no deficiency in open space provision; the adjoining sector has only a marginal shortfall in such provision. In any event under the terms of Policy OSR1 it is likely that provision would be required for an appropriate level of open space to be incorporated within any development proposal which might in the future be considered for this site; due to the potential size of any such scheme, this should result in the provision of a substantial amount of open space, properly laid out and managed and accessible to the public in general. To my mind this would adequately compensate for the amenity which local Objectors consider they would lose. Accordingly, given all those circumstances there is no sound basis on this score for resisting the present Plan allocation.

3.AS8.9 Nor on ecological grounds is there a justifiable case for objection. No part of this Area of Search is the subject of any special national or local designation and there is no expert evidence to suggest that it has any particular nature conservation value. However if at some future stage interests of importance were to be recognised, then under the terms of Policy ENV1 measures could be taken to ensure that any development scheme includes appropriate safeguards. As for those parts of the Green Network which are surrounded by, or adjoin, the allocation site, I have already identified that these are sufficiently well protected under the provisions of this Plan.

3.AS8.10 These same Objectors, together with the **Federation of Cheshire Green Parties**, also contend that this site is inappropriate for safeguarding in view of its agricultural

quality. I understand that a little over 50% of the identified Area of Search comprises Grades 2 and 3a land; accordingly these parts fall into the acknowledged best and most versatile category of land classification which national policy says should be protected, and developed only exceptionally. My opinion about this issue in general terms is recorded earlier [see paras 3.AS1.8 - 11]. As to its significance in the present case, I have already concluded that there are no sound Green Belt reasons for resisting the Local Plan allocation nor are there other grounds for keeping this site in its present open state; moreover, as I shall shortly explain, there is ample justification for bringing the allocation land forward for development. Consequently the "agricultural land quality" argument, which in any event relates to barely more than half this site, stands alone.

3.AS8.11 Set against this however is compelling evidence of a need to identify a significant amount of land for development both now and in the longer term as my conclusions on Policies LPS2 and LPS3 demonstrate. In addition the guidance in PPG3 calling for "a variety of sites in terms of both size and distribution" is particularly germane. This is the only major site identified in the Local Plan which is on the northern side of the town and potentially suited to housing; no other more acceptable sites in this sector have been formally proposed by Objectors. Therefore in terms of the Borough-wide land supply, not only does it add to the locational spread of sites but also, being one of the largest, it makes a valuable contribution to the overall size range. In my judgement, against the background of the more general considerations regarding this matter, these circumstances are sufficiently exceptional to outweigh the "agricultural land quality" argument. The position adopted by MAFF, whose initial objection to the allocation of Area of Search 8 has now been unconditionally withdrawn, gives support to this conclusion.

3.AS8.12 The **Parish Council** further asserts that traffic safety problems would arise from the development of the allocation site. This is a matter on which considerable evidence has been produced in relation to the objection by **Satnam Investments Ltd** and which is reported under the third primary issue. For the reasons given there I am satisfied that there is no overriding traffic safety consideration which supports the **Parish Council's** own unsubstantiated argument.

3.AS8.13 Lastly, the **Parish Council** identifies several of the Local Plan's guiding principles which, it is claimed, the allocation of Area of Search 8 contradicts. A number of these correspond with the points which I have already dealt with either expressly or implicitly under the first 2 primary issues; regarding the other specified principles there is simply no evidence to support this objection, a point which the Borough Council confirms. In any event, given that the Plan identifies no less than 17 guiding principles, I would not be surprised to find that certain policies and proposals fail to accord with every one. Realistically a balanced approach has to be taken in the preparation of the detailed provisions of this Plan and in relation to the allocation of Area of Search 8 I am satisfied that this has been done.

3.AS8.14 Turning to the third primary issue, **Satnam Investments Ltd** contends that land at Peel Hall Farm, comprising the majority of the identified Area of Search, is entirely suitable for primarily housing purposes and that in view of the current land supply position it should be allocated for such development immediately to enable some to take place within

the Plan period. In addition it is proposed that the allocation should include provision for a shopping development.

3.AS8.15 On environmental grounds there are several factors which support the Objector's case. I have already described how this land is well contained physically and how its character and appearance are strongly influenced by the extent of housing development around its periphery. Although the objection site is considerable in size it is not disproportionate in scale when compared with the very substantial urban area which it adjoins. Development on this site would certainly be well related to this existing area and no demonstrable harm would be likely to arise in landscape terms; this is a relatively flat, featureless site possessing no evident qualities. It would in my opinion represent an entirely acceptable form of rounding-off up to a clearly defined and very firm boundary, the motorway.

3.AS8.16 Additionally Peel Hall Farm is conveniently located in relation to the major employment areas west of Winwick Road and at Gemini and it is not too distant from the business parks at Birchwood and Woolston nor from the major site to be developed at Omega; it is also relatively close to the town centre. There are several local shops and services within easy reach, including by cyclists and pedestrians. In terms of public transport facilities, the use of which national guidance seeks to encourage, there are established bus services throughout the wider area; and it seems inconceivable to me that a development of the scale which this site is potentially capable of accommodating would not lead to an improvement and expansion of the system by the bus operators.

3.AS8.17 In the latter regard the **Federation of Cheshire Green Parties** criticises the allocation of the site (for safeguarding) as being essentially inconsistent with Agenda 21 and certain related provisions of PPG12 on the basis that it is not near a railway so thus its development would lead to increased road usage. On the contrary, I consider that in locational terms, given the relative proximity of employment opportunities, shops, services and other general facilities (notwithstanding the likelihood that the development itself due to its scale would include a certain amount of such provision), this site provides a quite remarkable opportunity to plan and secure a major housing development effectively within an established urban area in a way which largely respects the principles of energy conservation and sustainable development as identified in national guidance.

3.AS8.18 Another significant point in this site's favour is that because of its size there is considerable potential for a wide range and mixture of housing types to be provided here; and from the evidence presented to me, both regarding the possible development programme in this case and housebuilding rates generally, it seems clear that Peel Hall Farm would remain a valuable source of supply contributing towards Warrington's overall housing land provision for many years.

3.AS8.19 As for infrastructure and other technical considerations, the Borough Council accepts that there are none which would prevent the development of this site commencing within the Plan period. My earlier conclusions regarding particular matters raised by the **Parish Council**, the **Federation** and local residents relating to open space, agricultural land quality and nature conservation apply equally here. In respect of highways matters, **Satnam** has produced a scheme for the provision of 900 houses together with a small local shopping

centre and associated facilities (Option 2) served principally by a central spine road leading from Mill Lane/Blackbrook Avenue, a district distributor to the east; additional accesses are shown from other local roads. The accompanying technical evidence, which is not challenged by the Borough Council, demonstrates that in principle the envisaged development could be satisfactorily accessed. In this connection I note that the Highways Agency conditionally withdrew its initial objection to the safeguarding of the allocation land on the understanding that a traffic impact assessment would be required, and its findings implemented, prior to any development taking place here. I am confident that, given the terms of Policy T14 (as proposed for change), the same considerations would apply in relation to the earlier release of this land as now contemplated.

3.AS8.20 Thus given the foregoing circumstances, and against the background of national and regional guidance on the location of new housing and the relationship of transport and land-use planning all of which finds expression in the CSP and the strategic objectives of this Local Plan, in my judgement the objection site has considerable merit.

3.AS8.21 The Council itself expressly supports these arguments so far as the merits of Peel Hall Farm for housing are concerned. Its case for not positively allocating this land for development rests solely on the question of need, or rather the absence of it, at the present time. Yet for reasons already explained in my conclusions on objections to Policy LPS2 the Council's assessment of the housing land supply situation is flawed. I am convinced that there is an urgent need to identify further sites in this Plan in order to provide for additional housing during the period up to 2001 and in the immediate short term beyond.

3.AS8.22 Given all the foregoing considerations, there is clearly a compelling case for allocating the objection land for development at this time. Moreover, in forming this opinion I have not judged this site in isolation. In order to deal with this issue fully and equitably I have taken into account the respective merits of the other Areas of Search. However apart from nos 1, 16 and 21 which I am similarly recommending for immediate allocation none measures up to the present site.

3.AS8.23 While it is a matter of fact that Peel Hall Farm has a potential capacity which, taking into account other sites which I am recommending, numerically exceeds the amount that is actually necessary for the purposes of helping meet approved strategic requirements and maintain a continuing 5 years' housing land supply, this is an academic point. There is no dispute that for technical and marketing reasons amongst others only a limited number of houses (Satnam says 150) would be completed by 2001 and the rest would be built progressively (at a rate of about 100 per annum) thereafter. Accordingly, and notwithstanding that any apportionment of the objection site would be both arbitrary and impractical, there is no reason why it should not be allocated in its entirety for development under the provisions of this Plan. Indeed there would be noticeable benefits in so doing. Certainty about the future prospects for this land would enable potential developers to plan ahead and invest with confidence, while the Council would be able to prepare its IUDP housing development strategy in the knowledge that an amount of residual provision will be available here thereby easing the inevitable pressure for releasing greenfield sites elsewhere and limiting the scope for argument and objection regarding such matters at that time.



3.AS8.24 Furthermore the balance of Area of Search 8 which is not included in **Satnam's** objection site, comprising a parcel of farmland to the west and a small area east of Radley Common, must be treated similarly. Essentially these areas possess all the same attributes as Peel Hall Farm and could, as the Objector's scheme shows, be satisfactorily served by the proposed spine road. And, of course, they would make an added welcome contribution (about 200 units according to the Council's estimate) to the future housing provision.

3.AS8.25 On the matter of housing capacity I would add the same caveat as in the case of Area of Search 1 [see para 3.AS1.20]; while for the purpose of my recommendation I shall endorse the figure (1100 units in total) on which the parties agree, I am confident that in the spirit of my conclusions about the Plan's notional housing density they will take the opportunity to examine the scope for improving on this level of provision at a later stage of the planning process.

3.AS8.26 A number of other matters which **Satnam** raises in relation to the development of Peel Hall Farm remain outstanding. These concern whether or not there is a need for additional policies to be included in the Plan identifying first a requirement for a neighbourhood shopping centre within any future development and, secondly, a need to safeguard land for the construction of the Delph Lane Link Road; also whether certain site-specific revisions to Policy OSR6 are justified. A development scheme (Option 1) has been submitted which shows the broad route of the proposed safeguarded road and also includes provision for a neighbourhood centre and associated facilities; while this is an alternative scheme to Option 2 described earlier, it makes provision for the same amount of housing development and both include substantial areas of open space.

3.AS8.27 In the case of each of these additional matters there are specific objections under other appropriate policy references. For convenience I report on these matters separately under their respective policy chapter headings, namely Town Centre/Shopping, Transportation and Open Space/Recreation. I would confirm however that my conclusions on these matters have had no influence on my recommendation to delete Area of Search 8 and to allocate this land instead for development.

3.AS8.28 Lastly, I observe that the objection site as identified on **Satnam's** plans includes 2 areas, the central woodland and a playing field to the east, which the Local Plan proposes as part of the Green Network. While the Objector does not intend that these areas should be developed for housing, for the avoidance of any doubt I would confirm that the development allocation now recommended should be confined to the land shown on the Proposals Map as the Area of Search.

3.AS8.29 One other modification should be made to the Plan in relation to the allocation I am recommending. It is inevitable that, due to the scale of development which the subject land is potentially capable of accommodating, the variety and mix of possible uses, the range of associated technical, environmental, ecological and other issues which undoubtedly will have to be addressed and the certain need for a phasing programme, a comprehensive planning brief will need to be prepared at the earliest opportunity. On this understanding, it would be helpful if reference were made in the supporting text of Policy LPS2 to the

intention to issue such a brief, and outlining in the broadest of terms the basic considerations which it is expected the brief will need to cover.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **3.AS8.30 That:**

- (i) the Plan be modified by the deletion from Policy LPS3 of Area of Search 8 and by the inclusion of this site instead as a development allocation under the provisions of Policy LPS2 with a specified capacity of 1100 housing units;**
- (ii) the Proposals Map be modified accordingly;**
- (iii) the Reason and Explanation supporting Policy LPS2 be modified by the inclusion of text confirming the Council's intention to prepare a development brief for this site and outlining in broad terms the range of considerations which it is expected the brief will need to cover.**

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### **Area of Search 9 - Battlefield, Croft**

**OBJECTIONS - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (page 28)**

#### **Primary Issues**

- 3.AS9.1**
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on the need for open space in Croft and on environmental, ecological and traffic safety grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.

#### **Inspector's Conclusions**

**3.AS9.2** As to the first primary issue, this site lies on the north-eastern side of Croft, a small village in generally rural surroundings. Along the entire southern and western boundaries is an area of fairly dense housing. To the north is an equestrian centre which includes some large industrial-type buildings, while on the eastern side are fields with the village church just beyond. The identified Area of Search comprises 2 distinct parts. The

northern section consists of an open field within which lies a small pond, whereas the southern area is mostly semi-mature woodland but including a number of overgrown spaces.

3.AS9.3 The allocation land is plainly open in character and together with the adjoining fields and the more undeveloped parts of the equestrian centre helps define and contain the built-up area of the village; and it forms part of the open gap between Croft and Culcheth to the north-east. To that extent I accept that this site is capable of performing certain acknowledged Green Belt functions. However I am not convinced that it should be so designated.

3.AS9.4 From many vantage points this Area of Search is seen against the backdrop of the surrounding, quite extensive housing. Coupled with the nearby sizeable equestrian centre buildings, this creates a noticeable sense of enclosure around the allocation site; the presence of mature hedgerows and trees along other boundaries further enhances this effect. Consequently the impression here is not one of truly open countryside; this contrasts noticeably with the appearance and character of the much more exposed stretch of farmland to the north-east and there is a clear division, established by the site boundary features, between the two areas. Given those considerations, I conclude that, contrary to the views expressed by the Croft Parish Council, the Croft Residents Action Group and numerous local residents, the allocation land is not so well related to the surrounding countryside nor so important to the proper and essential functioning of the Green Belt around Croft that permanent protection in its present open state by inclusion within the proposed designated area is imperative. The Green Belt boundary in relation to Area of Search 9, as defined in this Plan, is firm and defensible. It should remain unchanged.

3.AS9.5 A further consideration influencing those conclusions is the longer-term development land supply position which I examine under Policy LPS3. In this regard my earlier comments generally about the need to identify certain sites for safeguarding notwithstanding their Green Belt potential [*see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4*] are particularly relevant here. This Area of Search, being related to one of Warrington's smaller villages, adds welcome variety to the general distribution of such sites and contributes to the wide range of sizes which the Plan identifies. While the Parish Council, the Action Group and local residents argue that there is no local requirement (meaning relative to Croft) for housing on this site, this is too narrow an interpretation of the term "locally-arising housing needs" for which the Local Plan is aiming to make provision in the post-2001 period.

3.AS9.6 The Objectors' case centres largely on the contention that there are few employment opportunities in the village and little likelihood of any emerging in future years; consequently, it is claimed there is no demand for extra housing which will need to be met, particularly given the number of properties currently available. However, as the Borough Council says, this ignores other factors such as household formation rates and market demand which influence the need for housing. In any event Croft does not, and cannot, function in isolation; it has an important role to play as one of several settlements around Warrington wherein necessary future housing provision must be made if there is to be choice and variety in the range and distribution of sites as national guidance advocates. For these reasons the Plan must address the matter of housing need in the context of the anticipated Borough-wide requirement post 2001.

3.AS9.7 Lastly on this issue, the **Parish Council**, the **Action Group** and certain other individuals point to the local expectation that this site would always be part of the Green Belt, particularly given the provisions of the CSP and the Outer Warrington Local Plan. However the CSP establishes only the general extent of the Green Belt and although Croft and its surroundings lie within the area so described the detailed boundaries are not defined; this, as the former SSE confirmed in his approval letter, is a matter for local plans to address. As to the Outer Warrington Local Plan, while this sought to define Green Belt boundaries, it never proceeded to adoption. Thus the question of altering established Green Belt boundaries, and hence possible conflict with PPG2 guidance about their permanence, does not arise. They will, around Croft, be adopted for the first time in this Local Plan.

3.AS9.8 Regarding the second primary issue, there is clearly a strong body of local opinion that the allocation site provides a valuable area of open space which, given the shortage of other such land and facilities in Croft, should be protected. It is suggested that in this respect the Area of Search allocation runs counter to principles and policies of both this Plan and the CSP.

3.AS9.9 It is evident from the number of informal paths which cross this site, particularly in the wooded southern section, that it is fairly well used by local residents for low-key recreational purposes; and understandably so because the trees, bushes and other plantlife create a rather pleasant environment. However this land is in private ownership and the general public appears to have no right of access over it; in strict terms this does not contribute to the formal provision of open space within the village therefore the allocation of this site as an Area of Search does not represent the loss of any such provision. In any event according to the Borough Council the suggested shortage of open space does not exist. Even so, if this land were safeguarded, and eventually developed, it is likely that under the terms of Policy OSR1 an appropriate measure of open space would be sought within any proposed housing scheme and this would be made accessible to the wider population.

3.AS9.10 Objectors also criticise the scale of development which this site could potentially accommodate saying that it would, together with the adjacent Area of Search 10, destroy the character and identity of Croft. I disagree. The **Parish Council** and the **Action Group** refer to the likely numerical and percentage increase in dwellings to support their arguments. Yet assessing scale is a matter of judgement. I have already described how the Battlefield site is reasonably well contained and closely related to a densely built-up part of the village. Given those considerations, I am satisfied that the impact of any future development here would be quite localised; it could without difficulty be designed to fit in well with the pattern of existing housing and is unlikely to be seen as an encroachment into the surrounding open countryside. Thus it would not be out of keeping in this locality and no significant harm to the character and appearance of the area need occur. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that the existing, admittedly limited, shops and services in the village would be incapable of satisfying any increase in demand or that any deficiency in such provision, if it were to arise, could not be rectified either as part of the development or elsewhere. I accept that if this site, with or without Area of Search 10, were eventually developed then by definition Croft would increase in scale; but not, to my mind, in an unacceptable way.

3.AS9.11 As for landscape quality to which some Objectors refer, while the woodland section is reasonably pleasant in appearance, it is not of any outstanding merit; nor does the remainder of this site possess any particular qualities. And the same can be said for the surrounding open land. This appears to be borne out by the fact that none of the area hereabouts has been recognised formally with any special landscape designation at national, regional or even local level. Accordingly there is no reason on these grounds why the allocation site should not be safeguarded as the Local Plan intends. Any individual features of interest which might be deemed worthy of protection could be incorporated within the design of any future scheme; Policy ENV6 is aimed at achieving this.

3.AS9.12 The ecological argument is rather more sound however. The southern section of the allocation land is designated by the County Council as a Site of Biological Importance (SBI) on account, I am told, of the species rich neutral grassland communities which are rare in a Warrington context. The Action Group has produced a detailed survey and analysis of the SBI, which the Council does not contest, which shows that this land supports a wide variety of fauna and flora.

3.AS9.13 Local Plan Policy ENV2 (as proposed for change) specifies that generally sites of nature conservation importance will be protected and enhanced and that, wherever appropriate, intrinsic features of interest or value will be safeguarded subject to certain considerations, one being the particular degree of significance and rarity value of the features on the individual site; Croft Grasslands is included within Grade C of the specified list of SBIs, the lowest category. These provisions broadly accord with the tenor of national guidance in PPG9.

3.AS9.14 The clear intention of Policy ENV2 is not to preclude all development on SBIs as a matter of course but to safeguard, as far as reasonably possible, particular features. Accordingly although these policy controls may have the effect of limiting the housing capacity of this Area of Search, there is no reason why, in principle, development on the southern section of the Battlefield site should necessarily put at risk the acknowledged nature conservation interest which this land possesses.

3.AS9.15 The northern section of this site has no formal recognition. However the Action Group's evidence, again not disputed by the Council, is that this too is of local conservation interest; the value of the pond is especially highlighted. Yet as with the SBI, the Area of Search allocation need be no threat to any such features of interest. Policy ENV1 is directed towards protecting nature conservation features generally and should ensure that any scheme for this part of the site would be designed with care and sensitivity.

3.AS9.16 The Parish Council and the Action Group also suggest there is conflict between the allocation of this land as an Area of Search and several other policies of the Local Plan concerned with such matters as wildlife habitats, landscape features and trees/woodlands. In each case though the policy is expressed essentially in the form of considerations to be taken into account; none which may be applicable to the present site seek to prevent development outright.

3.AS9.17 Overall I am satisfied that the Plan makes adequate provision for suitable controls to be exercised over any possible future development on the Battlefield site and that on ecological grounds there is no basis for resisting the safeguarding allocation.

3.AS9.18 There is also a considerable amount of local objection to this allocation on traffic safety grounds. It is claimed that the estate roads which would directly serve this site, and the wider network of local roads and lanes, are already unsatisfactory and are incapable of accommodating the scale of additional traffic which is likely to arise in the event of development.

3.AS9.19 Despite the strength of local feeling regarding this matter, there is simply no technical evidence to support the assertions which are made. The Borough Council acknowledges that the surrounding road system has certain limitations but goes on to say that while this may restrict the amount of housing which the Battlefield site might eventually be able to accommodate, it does not preclude development altogether.

3.AS9.20 The question of access and traffic safety generally is one of several which undoubtedly will be taken into account as part of the IUDP process when the future of all Areas of Search is likely to be examined in depth. However for the purposes of the present Plan there is nothing to persuade me that this site is wholly incapable of being developed in the longer term; thus the deletion of the safeguarding allocation cannot be justified on highways-related grounds.

3.AS9.21 Lastly the **Parish Council**, the **Action Group** and some local residents claim that this Area of Search allocation is inconsistent with the principles of sustainable development. I disagree. The test of "sustainability" in relation to any individual site necessarily involves a wide range of considerations and requires almost inevitably a balance to be struck as between merits and demerits. In my judgement the Battlefield site survives this test. The absence, as I have demonstrated above, of any overwhelming recreational, environmental, ecological or highways objection, the valuable role this site plays as part of the varied supply of safeguarded land and the approach of the Local Plan generally in its development strategy (especially in terms of its emphasis on urban regeneration taking priority over the release of greenfield sites) are compelling factors which convince me that the allocation of Area of Search 9 is acceptable in terms of sustainable development considerations.

3.AS9.22 For all the foregoing reasons I intend endorsing this Local Plan proposal. The **Parish Council** asks that in this event I should recommend the inclusion in the Plan of a list prioritising the Areas of Search and suggest that the Battlefield site should be low in the order. This would be wholly inappropriate. Policy LPS3 establishes a reserve of safeguarded land covering a range of sites which will be considered for development only at the time of this Plan's review (ie the IUDP). It is vital that the review process should be able to determine the merits of these various sites in a comprehensive and equitable fashion, and in the light of the most up-to-date information then available, unfettered by any provisions of the present Plan.

## RECOMMENDATION

**3.AS9.23** That no modification be made to the Plan in response to the listed objections.

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### Area of Search 10 - Lady Lane, Croft

OBJECTIONS - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (page 29)

#### Primary Issues

- 3.AS10.1**
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on the need for open space in Croft and on environmental, ecological and traffic safety grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site and given the development land supply position, can its allocation for housing purposes prior to 2001 be justified.

#### Inspector's Conclusions

**3.AS10.2** Regarding the first issue, this site lies on the edge of Croft village directly to the east of the woodland section of Area of Search 9 as described in the preceding case. This is a large, open and somewhat overgrown field. There is modern housing on the southern side and farmland to the north; Lady Lane borders the allocation land to the east and there is generally open countryside beyond although the village church stands close to the north-east corner.

**3.AS10.3** This site in itself is open in nature. Together with the adjoining woodland and surrounding fields it helps define and contain the built-up area of the village; and it forms part of the open gap between Croft and Culcheth to the north-east. While given those circumstances this Area of Search could be said to perform certain acknowledged Green Belt functions, I am not convinced that it should be included within the area so designated. When approaching the village along Lady Lane this site is seen against a backdrop of quite dense housing. The lane itself is a strong feature along the eastern boundary, while on the other side the woodland creates a noticeable visual barrier. These features, coupled with a fairly substantial screen of trees and shrubs on the northern boundary, enclose this land to such an

extent that it cannot be regarded as open countryside. In this respect it is appreciably different, in terms of appearance and character, from the much more substantial open areas to the north and east and is clearly divorced from them. Given those circumstances I reach precisely the same conclusions about the "Green Belt value" of this site as in the case of Area of Search 9 [see para 3.AS9.4]; its permanent protection as open land is not imperative. The Green Belt boundary around the Lady Lane site as proposed in this Plan is firm and defensible and deserves to remain unchanged.

3.AS10.4 Again, as with the preceding case, the question of housing need has an important bearing on my conclusions. Correspondingly **Croft Parish Council**, the **Croft Residents Action Group** and numerous **local residents** contend that there is no local requirement for further dwellings. My earlier comments about both this matter and villagers' expectations concerning the designation of the allocation land as Green Belt apply equally here [see paras 3.AS9.5 - 7].

3.AS10.5 As to the second primary issue all the basic arguments raised by the **Parish Council**, the **Action Group** and **local residents** regarding open space, environmental, ecological and traffic safety matters in relation to Area of Search 9 are repeated in the case of the present site. My observations are essentially the same [see paras 3.AS9.8 - 11 and 15 - 21]. This too is private land over which the public has no right of access; it is not excessive in scale; it has no special landscape quality; it does not evidently support any significant features of nature conservation interest; and it would in general terms be served by the same network of local roads as Area of Search 9. Given those considerations, and for the reasons explained in the preceding case, I am satisfied that there is no basis, on grounds of lack of open space, environmental harm, landscape quality, ecological damage or conflict with either Plan policies or sustainable development principles, for resisting the allocation of the Lady Lane site as an Area of Search. Also, as before [see para 3.AS9.22], the **Parish Council's** argument for a priority list of such Areas is without merit.

3.AS10.6 Turning to the third issue, **Mr and Mrs Jehan** contend there is a need for the immediate release of the allocation site for development purposes in order to reduce the shortfall in the Borough-wide housing provision which they allege exists. **Messrs Harrison, McCarthy, Taylor and Others** say much the same. My analysis under Policy LPS2 of the development land supply situation during the remainder of the Plan period demonstrates that there is no need to allocate this Area of Search for housing at this time; strategic requirements can be satisfactorily met from other more acceptable sources either already identified/allocated in the Plan or recommended by me for adoption.

3.AS10.7 As for site-specific considerations which these Objectors highlight, the allocation land does have certain merits in terms of its suitability for development. Any scheme would be well related to the established built-up area, there seem to be no significant infrastructure constraints nor any overwhelming environmental problems, the question of agricultural land quality does not arise, major employment areas in the north-eastern sector of Warrington are not too distant, a moderate level of public transport provision is available and I understand there are no ownership constraints on this land; furthermore in locational terms this adds to the variety and choice which there is in the range and distribution of the potential development land supply in this Borough. Accordingly much of the advice in PPG3



about sites for new housing is met. Yet significantly all those factors also point to this site's suitability for safeguarding as the guidance in PPG2(Annex B) confirms.

3.AS10.8 As previously explained in my conclusions on Policy LPS3, the availability of suitable sites for safeguarding is limited and in all the circumstances Area of Search 10 should remain as part of the Plan's identified reserve of such land.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

3.AS10.9 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to the listed objections.

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## **Area of Search 11 - Culcheth West**

**OBJECTIONS** - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (pages 30 - 39)

### **Primary Issues**

- 3.AS11.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on environmental, social and technical infrastructure and traffic safety grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.

### **Inspector's Conclusions**

3.AS11.2 As to the first primary issue, this is an extensive area of open land on the western side of Culcheth which is one of the largest villages in the Borough. There is a modern housing estate to the east and further properties border this site on its south-eastern side. Along the entire south-western boundary is the Culcheth Linear Park (CLP), a former railway line now used as a major recreational pathway/cycleway, beyond which is open countryside. To the north is a golf course.

3.AS11.3 The allocation site is, by reason of its scale and nature, plainly open in character and it helps contain and define the built-up area of the village. To that extent it can be said to perform a Green Belt purpose. However, despite the strength of objection which there is from **Culcheth and Glazebury Parish Council**, the **Culcheth and Glazebury Action Group**, **Peel Holdings plc** and a considerable number of local residents calling for this land to be so designated, I am not convinced that such a course of action is justified.

3.AS11.4 There is housing effectively around 2 sides of this site; this has a noticeable urbanising influence on these immediate surroundings. The other 2 boundaries are defined by belts of mature trees, especially so along the CLP which represents a formidable physical and visual barrier. These features combine to create a strong sense of enclosure around the allocation land so much so that it does not in itself have the appearance and character of rural countryside. This is in distinct contrast to the golf course and further open ground to the north, as well as to the extensive stretch of farmland west of the CLP; the boundary trees which provide a clear division between the site and those areas (which are designated by the Local Plan as Green Belt) give further emphasis to this contrast. Given those considerations, to my mind this site is far better related to the built-up area of Culcheth than to its rural surroundings.

3.AS11.5 Moreover if in the longer term the allocation land were developed no demonstrable harm, in Green Belt terms, would necessarily arise. Of course Culcheth would expand quite substantially; but not in an uncontrolled fashion. Any new development would be adequately contained by the CLP and the northern tree belt so there need be no reason to fear yet further sprawl into the more sensitive countryside beyond. Those features represent firm and defensible boundaries for the Green Belt. Nor would the gap between Culcheth and Croft, the nearest settlement to the south-west, be effectively reduced. Already on this side of Culcheth the CLP represents the boundary to the greater part of the built-up area. That "line" would not be breached by development, if it were to take place, on the allocation land. In those circumstances the perception of separation between these 2 settlements would remain unchanged.

3.AS11.6 The Parish Council and the Action Group argue that if this site were designated as Green Belt then it would assist in the process of urban regeneration whereas it would serve no such function as an Area of Search. I disagree. The Local Plan development strategy, in Policy LPS1 as proposed for change, clearly specifies that the review of development needs beyond 2001 (as part of the IUDP) will be based on the principle that urban regeneration will continue to take precedence over the allocation of greenfield sites and that only if such opportunities cannot be identified will Areas of Search be considered for release. Thus, in practice, the Plan's proposal to safeguard the Culcheth West site would not put seriously at risk any prospects for urban regeneration elsewhere in the Borough.

3.AS11.7 In addition my earlier comments concerning the general approach which needs to be taken in examining the suitability of sites for safeguarding [see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4] are especially relevant to the present case. The Culcheth West allocation is one of the few large sites which either the Plan identifies or I am otherwise recommending; as such it makes, in terms of potential capacity, a significant contribution to the Plan's total provision of safeguarded land and it adds welcome variety to the range of sizes and general distribution of such sites.

3.AS11.8 This allocation also scores well in terms of the guidance in PPG2 about the identification of safeguarded land. Given the close relationship of this site with neighbouring housing, its integration into the existing built-up area should be easy to achieve in any future development scheme. In addition there seem to be reasonable prospects for employment opportunities. For example the Taylor Business Park is already established in the locality and the Local Plan contemplates its expansion; also there are shops and services in the village

centre, while the major employment areas in the north-eastern sector of Warrington are not too distant. In regard to public transport provision there is evidence before me that bus services to and from Culcheth are reasonably good. And, as I shall shortly explain, there are no insurmountable infrastructure or technical constraints which would altogether preclude development on the allocation land; nor is there any "agricultural land quality" argument in this case and no significant environmental or landscape problems arise. In these circumstances, and bearing in mind my earlier conclusions about safeguarding land around Culcheth in general [see para 3.3.5] the allocation of this site as an Area of Search aligns favourably with the principles of sustainable development. It is also broadly consistent with the guidance in PPGs 3 and 13 about the location of housing particularly when considered in the context of the Plan's overall approach to the selection of Areas of Search.

3.AS11.9 For all the foregoing reasons I am convinced that the value of this site as part of the reserve of safeguarded land far outweighs any potential contribution which it might be able to make to the Green Belt hereabouts. Accordingly, on these grounds no modification to the Plan is warranted.

3.AS11.10 In reaching these conclusions I have borne in mind what appears to be the fundamental view of most local Objectors that this site has been part of the long-established Green Belt around Culcheth and that it should remain unchanged. However the fact is that while this area lies within the general extent of the Green Belt as described in the CSP, there never has been an adopted Local Plan which defines the detailed boundaries of the designated area around this village. The current Plan therefore provides the opportunity to do this, and thereby decide whether or not to include this site in the formal Green Belt, for the first time. In this connection I reject the **Parish Council/Action Group's** claim that this Plan proposal amounts to an alteration to the general extent of the Green Belt. When considered in the context of the overall size of the North Cheshire Green Belt the change arising from the allocation of this site for safeguarding purposes would be negligible. There is no question therefore of having to establish exceptional circumstances.

3.AS11.11 As for the second primary issue, there is significant local objection on the grounds that Culcheth has grown substantially in size over recent years and is unable to accommodate any more housing; and that the development of the allocation land would be out of keeping with the scale and character of this village. The extent of modern development in Culcheth is clear to see and I can understand residents' fears about the prospect of yet more to come. However my conclusions regarding this Plan proposal must be based on current circumstances which demonstrate that Culcheth is a large settlement with a sizeable shopping centre and, elsewhere within its confines, there are industrial and business premises and recreational, educational and other facilities to serve the local population.

3.AS11.12 Against the background of those factors, in my opinion the development of this site, if it were to occur, would not be out of scale either in physical or population terms. I have already described how the allocation land is well contained and closely related to the existing built-up area; accordingly any new development here could quite easily be absorbed into the fabric of the village and no significant harm to the character and appearance of these surroundings need arise. In broad terms it would complete the built-up area on this side of Culcheth, rounding-off in an appropriate fashion what is at present a somewhat ragged and unappealing hard urban edge.

3.AS11.13 While many Objectors assert that existing facilities and services in the village would be put under increased pressure, there is no firm evidence to substantiate this. The centre includes a relatively wide range of shops and local services, and several other businesses; this is within fairly easy reach of the Culcheth West site, even by cyclists and pedestrians. There appear to be a number of potential employment opportunities in the village including, in particular, the Taylor Business Park which also is not too far from this site. In any event, bearing in mind the Local Plan's intentions for Areas of Search generally, some additional limited provision for shops and employment might be considered within any future scheme for the allocation land should it eventually be released.

3.AS11.14 Schools too are alleged by many Objectors to be overcrowded and unable to accommodate the increased child population which would arise from the development of this Area of Search. Yet the information from the Education Authority is that although the County High School would have some difficulty coping with the anticipated increase, the 3 primary schools would not. This evidence does not suggest to me that there is such an insurmountable problem as to preclude the safeguarding of the allocation land for possible future development post 2001.

3.AS11.15 As for local concerns about drainage infrastructure, these too appear to be unfounded. The Borough Council says that any new development would, under the terms of Local Plan Policies DC1 and DC4, be required to provide for its own direct infrastructure consequences either on or off-site as necessary; the National Rivers Authority (which has not formally objected to this Plan allocation) confirms that any possible objections which it might have in regard to future schemes would be met in this way. There is no suggestion that measures deemed necessary and appropriate could not be taken. In the present circumstances these are matters which in my judgement would be more appropriately addressed first when reviewing in detail the merits of all the Areas of Search as part of the IUDP process and then again later at the development control stage if and when that arises in relation to any one such Area. On the evidence before me this is certainly not an issue which demonstrates the unacceptability of the Culcheth West site for safeguarding at this time.

3.AS11.16 The arguments raised by the Parish Council, the Action Group, Peel Holdings plc and most local residents regarding the limitations of the surrounding highway network have much more substance however. Peel in particular presents detailed evidence on road capacities, traffic flows and accident statistics which convinces me that development on the scale which this Area of Search is potentially able to accommodate would be likely to have a noticeable adverse impact on highway conditions in this locality. My own observations confirm the views expressed by many Objectors that the older main roads in this locality are already often very busy; also that parking facilities in the village centre frequently become congested.

3.AS11.17 The Borough Council itself recognises the limitations of the nearby road system which would be required to serve any development of the allocation land. I am told that in several respects many of these roads and their junctions are below current design standards and that improvements would be difficult to achieve because of ownership constraints.

3.AS11.18 On these grounds therefore there is reason to conclude that this site would not be genuinely capable of development when needed thereby bringing into serious question the merits of the safeguarding allocation.

3.AS11.19 However the Council's formal position is that there are practical solutions, albeit costly, involving the construction of new access links to the nearest main roads which any prospective developer would have the opportunity to consider. A detailed traffic study would be required to examine and evaluate all the issues and to identify the necessary improvements. This exercise, the Council maintains, could properly be done at a later stage in the planning process when the precise amount of acceptable development could be established. Even if no such accesses were provided, this site would not be entirely incapable of development; a limited number of houses could still satisfactorily be accommodated.

3.AS11.20 The Parish Council and the Action Group jointly have put forward technical evidence in response to those submissions. Yet while this creates considerable doubt about the feasibility of the suggested solutions, it does not rule them out altogether as a means of resolving the identified problems; nor does it reject completely the notion of a limited development being served by existing roads.

3.AS11.21 Another point argued forcibly by many Objectors is that local residents' amenities, their "quality of life", would suffer if the allocation land were to be developed. As for the relationship between any new development and the immediate surrounding houses, much would depend on the design of the eventual scheme but there is no reason in principle why harm should arise; a normal part of the development control process would be to protect the interests of both existing and future residents. Furthermore, in broader terms, given my conclusions about the acceptability of the scale of this site in relation to Culcheth as a whole, the quality of life enjoyed generally by the local population should not materially worsen. Accordingly, the Objectors' fears are unfounded.

3.AS11.22 The Parish Council and the Action Group also raise the question of conflict between this allocation and the Local Plan's own guiding principles. My earlier comments on a similar point made in relation to Area of Search 8 [see para 3.AS8.13] apply equally here.

3.AS11.23 Overall, this is a marginal case but, in all the circumstances, I consider that the balance lies in favour of the continued safeguarding of this site for possible longer-term development. Put simply, the available evidence does not conclusively demonstrate that the Local Plan allocation is wrong. There is a realistic prospect of some development taking place here, although on a scale which cannot yet be predicted with any confidence. While this remains the situation, and as long as there is a need to maintain a reserve of safeguarded land at the level which I am recommending the Plan should make provision for, it is entirely appropriate to retain this site as an Area of Search.

3.AS11.24 I appreciate that my basic conclusions regarding this case contradict those of the Inspector who dealt with the Outer Warrington Local Plan Inquiry in 1985 when the Culcheth West site was previously under consideration. However then the Plan had designated this land as Green Belt and an Objector had proposed it for longer-term housing development; in any event that Plan was never adopted. Many Objectors now argue that

circumstances have not changed since that time. I disagree. The previous Inspector was looking at a completely different Green Belt time-horizon and considering the need for safeguarding against the background of a housing land supply position which is now more than 10 years out of date. Also, from the Inspector's report it does not seem that she was required to give consideration to any matter (such as those I describe under the second primary issue) other than environmental impact and longer-term housing needs when examining whether there was a case for safeguarding this site; and of course she did not have the benefit of the sort of guidance which is now contained in Annex B of PPG2 about identifying safeguarded land. These represent significant differences between the circumstances surrounding the previous Inspector's consideration of this matter and those which have influenced my own conclusions.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**3.AS11.25 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to the listed objections.**

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### **Area of Search 12 - Waltham Avenue, Glazebury**

**OBJECTIONS - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (pages 40 - 49)**

#### **Primary Issues**

- 3.AS12.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt; or alternatively, having regard to the development land supply position, can its allocation for housing purposes prior to 2001 be justified.
  - Are there compelling environmental grounds for extending this Area of Search to include land to the south.

#### **Inspector's Conclusions**

3.AS12.2 As to the first issue, this site comprises open farmland situated towards the northern end of Glazebury which is a small, linear village in generally rural surroundings. Along most of its eastern boundary the allocation land is bordered by housing, although there is a short frontage to the A574 which is the main road through this village; on all other sides there is open ground in either agricultural or recreational use.

3.AS12.3 The Deposit Draft Plan proposal to allocate this site as an Area of Search attracted a considerable amount of objection from **Culcheth and Glazebury Parish Council**, the **Culcheth and Glazebury Action Group**, **Peel Holdings plc** and numerous local residents all of whom called for the land to be designated instead as Green Belt. The Borough Council, as part of its Proposed Changes, agreed (part of LPS3-a and 3-b, and LPS5-g). As a consequence many objections have been conditionally withdrawn. However this also led to a counter-objection from **Fairclough Homes Ltd** who had already objected to the Deposit Draft proposal on the grounds that this site should be allocated for housing within the Plan period.

3.AS12.4 In my judgement the Council's changed approach is entirely right. This site is, due to its nature, appearance and absence of any significant boundary treatment, virtually indistinguishable from the farmland which largely surrounds it; and in broad terms it compares favourably with the recreational area directly to the south. To my mind it possesses the clear characteristics of open countryside and, as such, would make a valuable contribution to the proposed Green Belt around this village.

3.AS12.5 If the allocation land were safeguarded as the Deposit Draft Plan intends, and in the longer-term developed, demonstrable harm would be likely to arise; it would have the appearance of an uncontrolled sprawl of development encroaching into this countryside fringe. At present the built-up area of Glazebury is generally well defined and on this side of the A574 is very limited in depth. The Plan proposal would substantially extend the village in an illogical and inappropriate fashion and would leave the Green Belt hereabouts with a weak and potentially indefensible boundary.

3.AS12.6 Those comments of course apply just as forcefully to **Fairclough Homes'** proposal for the immediate allocation of this site for housing. This objection however is based essentially on the failure of the Local Plan, first to identify sufficient land to meet strategic requirements and, secondly, to provide an appropriate measure of choice and flexibility. These matters are fully examined in my earlier assessment of the current development land supply position under Policy LPS2. While I accept the Objector's fundamental argument about the overall situation, for the reasons explained in that assessment there is simply no need to release the present site for housing purposes. Strategic requirements can be satisfactorily met from other more acceptable sources either already identified/allocated in the Plan or recommended by me for adoption; correspondingly these provide for a land supply which is suitably varied and flexible in terms of its range and distribution of sites.

3.AS12.7 Given all those considerations, it is clear that the present site is neither suitable nor required for housing purposes. On the other hand, as open land it has a vital role to play and to my mind the need to protect it permanently in this state is compelling. Accordingly it should be designated as Green Belt; I therefore support the Proposed Changes.

3.AS12.8 Regarding the second primary issue, **Mr Worthington** proposes that the recreation ground due south of the allocation site and 2 strips of open land further on should be added to this Area of Search. This he claims would provide the opportunity for development which would be easily integrated with the existing village creating no harm in Green Belt terms. I disagree. This proposal would simply worsen the environmental damage

which development of the originally allocated Area of Search would cause. This additional land is just as important to the open character of these surroundings and makes the same valuable contribution to the Green Belt hereabouts. Given those circumstances and the powerful reasons for deleting Area of Search 12, there is no justification for modifying the Plan in the way this Objector suggests.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **3.AS12.9 That:**

- (i) the Plan be modified by the deletion of Area of Search 12 in accordance with Proposed Changes LPS3-a (part) and LPS3-b (part);**
- (ii) the Proposals Map be modified by the designation of land at Waltham Avenue, Glazebury as Green Belt in accordance with Proposed Change LPS5-g;**
- (iii) no modification be made to the Plan in response to objection 5786 (Mr Worthington).**

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## **Area of Search 13 - Glazebrook**

**OBJECTIONS - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (page 50)**

### **Primary Issues**

- 3.AS13.1**
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Based on those same considerations and in the light of national guidance on safeguarding land, is there justification for the allocation of this Area of Search for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Alternatively, having regard to the current development land supply position, is there justification for the allocation of this Area of Search for housing purposes prior to 2001.



## Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS13.2 This Area of Search is one of the largest allocated in the Plan and is unique in terms of the variety of land uses which it comprises. There are several distinct parcels of land. The north-eastern section lies between Glazebrook Lane and the River Glaze and consists of a relatively narrow strip of farmland, a farmhouse and buildings complex and a sizeable hotel. The central section, which is effectively encircled by Glazebrook Lane, Bank Street and the Liverpool-Manchester railway line, is mostly open arable land. In addition there are 2 ribbons of housing which front on to Bank Street as well as a few other more isolated properties, while beside the railway is Glazebrook Station and a group of cottages. The south-western section comprises primarily a partially wooded, former military camp; this includes a range of small derelict buildings together with very much larger premises once used as a country club. There is also a limited number of residential properties within the northernmost tip of this section. The south-eastern section consists of another derelict military camp although this has the appearance essentially of overgrown land with only a few areas of hardstanding and surfaced pathways remaining from the former use. Between the 2 camp sites the rest of the Area of Search comprises a stretch of farmland and a group of about a dozen houses.

3.AS13.3 The railway line marks the northern boundary of the entire allocated area; there is mainly open farmland beyond although for a short distance there are residential properties along both sides of Glazebrook Lane. To the west and south is open countryside. Between the south-easternmost section of the Area of Search and the River Glaze is a compact and limited area of housing together with a small group of commercial premises. On the other side of the river (including the stretch up to the railway line) is a narrow strip of open, recreational land and then an extensive built-up area on the western edge of Salford.

3.AS13.4 **Rixton-with-Glazebrook Parish Council, Salford City Council, Peel Holdings plc, the Glazebrook Residents Action Group and numerous local residents** all ask that this site be designated as Green Belt. In my judgement their objections are well founded. This is a substantial area of land which, despite the presence of a number of dwellings and other buildings, is essentially open in nature; the 3 main parcels of farmland and the cleared/overgrown/wooded parts of the former military camps make up by far the greater proportion of the identified Area of Search and it is these that have most influence on the appearance and character of the overall site.

3.AS13.5 Given those considerations, and since around the extensive southern and western boundaries there are no features of significance which create any sense of separation from the surrounding farmland, I regard the allocation land as constituting an integral part of the wider area of countryside hereabouts. Admittedly this site is less well related to the stretch of countryside to the north due principally to the presence of the railway and its embankments. However this does not alter the perception of this large-scale area of land as being an important element of this extensive, generally open landscape.

3.AS13.6 In these circumstances I am convinced that the value of the allocation land to the proposed Green Belt is considerable. Given its scale and present state, it helps check the unrestricted sprawl of the neighbouring urban area thereby assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and, significantly, it forms an important part of the relatively

narrow open gap which separates Warrington and the western edge of the Greater Manchester conurbation.

3.AS13.7 There are also strong representations from the **City Council** and the **Action Group** about the role that the allocation land plays in helping promote and secure regeneration within the neighbouring conurbation, a further reason they claim for designating this site as Green Belt. The Borough Council's response to those arguments are not convincing. RPG13 confirms that urban regeneration should continue to be central to land use policy and that the conurbations should continue to be the prime focus for regeneration and environmental improvement. I understand that the regeneration of existing urban areas is the principal theme of Salford's Adopted Unitary Development Plan. Given the very close relationship between the Glazebrook area and the conurbation, it seems inevitable that if this Area of Search were confirmed and eventually brought forward for development then it would present a greater threat to Salford, in terms of it being a competitive source of building land, than to the town of Warrington.

3.AS13.8 I accept the Borough Council's point that the Local Plan strategy emphasises that, in addressing longer-term needs, priority will be given to urban regeneration in preference to the release of Areas of Search. It is easily within the Council's hands to ensure that all such opportunities within Warrington are properly and fully examined at the appropriate time. However, as for the possible impact on urban regeneration opportunities in Salford, addressing this would require close inter-Authority consultation and co-operation. The fact that the **City Council** has seen fit to object so vehemently to this particular Local Plan allocation gives me no confidence about the likelihood of the conurbation's regeneration interests being adequately protected in the future under the provisions of Policy LPS1 (as proposed for change).

3.AS13.9 In all the circumstances I conclude that the allocation site is, as open land, capable of serving positively the additional purpose of assisting the regeneration of the conurbation thus further justifying its inclusion within the Green Belt.

3.AS13.10 The Borough Council accepts that this site has some merit in most of the foregoing respects but argues fundamentally that the need for it to be safeguarded for possible longer-term development is overwhelming. While I acknowledge that there is a need generally to make provision for such development by identifying as Areas of Search sites which might otherwise be capable of serving Green Belt purposes, my assessment under Policy LPS3 of the longer-term land supply position demonstrates that an adequate reserve of safeguarded land can be achieved in order to help address anticipated future development requirements without recourse to this particular site; there are other more acceptable sources of supply either already allocated by the Plan or recommended by me for adoption. Nor are the Council's site-specific arguments persuasive as I shall explain shortly when dealing with the second primary issue.

3.AS13.11 For all the foregoing reasons I conclude that the need to keep this site permanently open is paramount. Thus it should be designated as Green Belt. As things stand, there is a clear division, represented by the River Glaze valley and the recreational strip alongside, between this area of countryside and the built-up outskirts of Salford. This forms a logical and defensible continuous boundary for the Green Belt hereabouts. Indeed,

for all but the short easternmost boundary of the allocation site the Local Plan already recognises this as being the most appropriate limit for the proposed designated area where it faces Salford's urban edge. In this connection I observe from the Proposals Map that the small built-up area of Glazebrook which lies due east of the allocation land is "washed over" by the Green Belt; so too is the frontage housing along Glazebrook Lane just north of the railway. In neither case has there been any objection to those Plan proposals.

3.AS13.12 As to the second issue, many Objectors contend that the allocation of this site as an Area of Search conflicts with national and other planning policy guidance on identifying land for safeguarding. I largely share those views. PPG2(Annex B) deals expressly with this matter. I have already described the close inter-relationship between the allocation land and the surrounding open countryside, and the very limited extent of the 2 main pockets of housing which represent the bulk of the Glazebrook community. To my mind a development of the scale which Area of Search 13 is potentially capable of accommodating would be completely out of keeping with Glazebrook and its surroundings and would cause serious damage to the character and appearance of this locality. Notwithstanding the open strip created by the river valley and the adjoining recreational area, it would have the effect of extending the Greater Manchester conurbation westwards thereby encroaching significantly over open countryside in an illogical and inappropriate fashion and eroding a substantial part of the fragile gap which presently separates that area from Warrington.

3.AS13.13 The provisions of Policy HR1, on which the Borough Council appears to rely for its expectation that the scale of any eventual development can be controlled to acceptable limits, would in my opinion be incapable of successfully mitigating the impact of future proposals if once this land were so allocated in the IUDP. The scale of potential development which in principle the Local Plan anticipates, by reason of its identification of Area of Search 13, would overwhelm Glazebrook; only by rendering meaningless the intent and purpose of this allocation could the provisions of Policy HR1 have the sort of effect to which the Council alludes. That would not be a responsible or realistic way to implement those provisions.

3.AS13.14 In terms of public transport considerations, I recognise, as the Borough Council points out, that this site benefits considerably from its proximity to Glazebrook Station; moreover the Liverpool-Warrington-Manchester line is already named in CSP Policy T8 as a priority for improvement. Bus services, on the other hand, I am told are not good and while no doubt these would be extended and improved if in the future this site were to be developed, the same sort of argument could be applied to any of the other Areas of Search. Nor does the allocation land have any particular advantage in regard to employment opportunities. Indeed it is reasonable to presume that it fares worse than any other identified Area of Search since it is the only one not attached to the town or a recognised village; and while it is not too distant from the major employment areas in the north-east sector of Warrington as well as those in Salford, the relative proximity of such opportunities is a common factor amongst other safeguarded sites as is the likelihood, in the case of the larger Areas of Search, of some on-site employment provision being included in any future schemes. As for other social and community services, from the evidence available there seem to be none of significance currently in Glazebrook.

3.AS13.15 Regarding existing infrastructure, there appear to be no insurmountable problems. The **Parish Council** asserts that the existing highway network, utility services and drainage systems are inadequate to serve a development of this potential scale; many **local residents** make similar points. However in respect of access arrangements the Borough Council's technical assessment confirms that with suitable improvements the present road system could cope, while local fears about other services are not borne out by any authoritative evidence whatsoever. **Salford City Council** claims that increased pressure on educational and community provision within its administrative area would arise. Given the proximity of Glazebrook to Salford's urban area, that may well be the case. However the City Council does not rule out the prospect of some additional provision being made in that event and, bearing in mind the scale of this Area of Search and its development potential, the inclusion of certain services and facilities either within any future scheme or in the locality is also a distinct possibility; Local Plan Policy DC3 provides for this.

3.AS13.16 Several Objectors raise the matter of agricultural land quality. Almost all the land within this Area of Search which is currently being farmed is of the recognised best and most versatile quality. My comments on this issue generally are set out earlier [*see paras 3.AS1.8 - 11*]. On this occasion, unlike in the case of many other Areas of Search, there are no compelling "development need" grounds which warrant setting aside the clear guidance in PPG7 that agricultural land of this quality should be protected. I acknowledge, as the Borough Council emphasises, that MAFF has made no objection to this particular Plan allocation; this does not alter my view that safeguarding this entire site for possible future development is inconsistent with the foregoing advice.

3.AS13.17 The Borough Council disputes the argument raised by many Objectors that this allocation is in conflict with the principles of sustainable development. In my opinion although the present site scores well in terms of there being a choice of transport modes available and includes some land which has previously been developed, it is disadvantaged by the absence of even a moderate amount of social infrastructure in the immediate vicinity. In virtually all other respects the allocation land is not materially different from most other Areas of Search identified in the Plan. Thus, on sustainable development grounds there is nothing of significance about this site to enhance its position under the PPG2 spotlight.

3.AS13.18 Lastly, PPG2 also requires that account be taken of national guidance on housing and transportation. The **Action Group** and **Peel Holdings plc** claim that certain provisions of PPG3 relating to new settlements are especially relevant. The Borough Council on the other hand sees this as an opportunity to consolidate Glazebrook's existing fragmented pattern of development and to provide local services and facilities thereby enhancing the character of the existing settlement. It says that the guidance in PPG3 is not applicable because this Area of Search has not been identified as (to use the words of PPG3) "an alternative to the infill or further expansion of existing towns and villages".

3.AS13.19 To my mind, such is the scale and nature of this Plan proposal relative to the size of Glazebrook that it can reasonably be regarded as tantamount to the prospective development of a completely new settlement; indeed the Local Plan describes it so. However I recognise that this allocation does not contemplate anything quite so substantial as that which the general tone of the specified guidance seems to suggest is in question. Nevertheless whether the identified provisions of PPG3 are directly applicable to this case

appears to be a rather academic point. In practice irrespective of whether the proposal amounts to a new settlement in the sense of national guidance, or simply the major expansion of an existing village, much the same basic environmental, infrastructure and sustainable development considerations need to be addressed when examining its merits.

3.AS13.20 A similar point arises in relation to arguments put forward by the **Parish Council** and many **local residents** alleging conflict with certain CSP policies. Any considerations raised by those provisions which are relevant to this case are already adequately covered by my earlier comments.

3.AS13.21 In reaching my conclusions on the second primary issue I have borne in mind the Borough Council's strongly argued point about the degree to which this site has fallen into a state of disuse and dereliction; this, it is said, helps justify the Plan allocation. However, notwithstanding that only 2 sections (the former military camps) of this Area of Search can reasonably be described in those terms, the present condition of this land is such that no serious environmental harm appears to be caused; certainly not to the extent that it needs to be remedied by development. On the more wooded section the major building has apparently continued in use until fairly recently, while the remaining structures, although decaying, are generally small scale and not too conspicuous. As for the south-eastern section, there are no outward signs of dereliction; in fact this area is, due to its overgrown state, regarded by the **Action Group** and several **local residents** as having some ecological merit and therefore deserving of protection in its own right. I am conscious of the guidance in PPGs 2 and 3 about neglected and derelict land but in the present case give this matter little weight.

3.AS13.22 One further consideration relating to the "washed over" status of Glazebrook's main housing areas reinforces my overall conclusions. If this Area of Search were to survive and, at the time of the IUDP, become a positive development allocation it would be wholly illogical and inappropriate for the larger "washed over" area to remain within the by then adopted Green Belt. The Borough Council admits that in such circumstances it would expect to include this area within a newly defined inset village. Of necessity therefore the Green Belt boundaries established by the present Plan would need to be altered only a very few years after their adoption. This is hardly consistent with the widely acknowledged concept of defining Green Belt boundaries which will endure, nor with the Local Plan's own declared objective in this regard.

3.AS13.23 For all the foregoing reasons I am convinced that a case for retaining Area of Search 13 in the Local Plan cannot be substantiated.

3.AS13.24 Regarding the third primary issue, **Dominium Properties Ltd** calls for the immediate allocation of this site, either as a whole or in part, for housing purposes; its case is based essentially on the failure of the Local Plan to identify sufficient land to meet strategic requirements for the period to 2001. However my analysis under Policy LPS2 of the development land supply position during the remainder of the current Plan period and in the immediate short term beyond, conclusively demonstrates that there is no need to allocate any part of this site for housing at the present time. Strategic requirements can be satisfactorily met from other more acceptable sources either already identified/allocated in the Plan or recommended by me for adoption.

3.AS13.25 Nor are there any compelling site-specific arguments to support the Objector's proposition. My reasons for rejecting the Borough Council's case for safeguarding this land, as explained under the second primary issue, apply equally in this regard.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS13.26 That:

- (i) the Plan be modified by the deletion of Area of Search 13;
- (ii) the Proposals Map be modified by the designation of the land at Glazebrook currently comprising Area of Search 13 as Green Belt.

### Area of Search 14 - Reddish Lane, Lymm

OBJECTIONS:	O/01656/LPS3.14/00708	N M & F Follina
	O/05899/LPS3.14/02907	Mr G Morris
	O/07073/LPS3.14/03698	Mr & Mrs D Hartshorn
	O/07094/LPS3.14/03708	B G Hasprey
	O/07113/LPS3.14/03712	Mr Wilfred Dyke
	O/07114/LPS3.14/03714	P Skade
	O/07115/LPS3.14/03715	Joan Wright
	O/07177/LPS3.14/03749	F & S Taylor
	O/07178/LPS3.14/03750	Mr & Mrs James Williams
	O/07179/LPS3.14/03752	Mr Michael J A Rhodes
	O/07181/LPS3.14/03753	Kathryn Rhodes
	O/07182/LPS3.14/03754	Y M Nichols
	O/07183/LPS3.14/03755	Mr & Mrs F Woodcock
	O/07196/LPS3.14/03761	Mr & Mrs William Pearson
	O/07216/LPS3.14/03770	Mr Brian Thomas Faulkner
	O/07221/LPS3.14/03771	Mrs R Faulkner
	O/07269/LPS3.14/03785	Mr & Mrs Brian J Byrne
	O/07297/LPS3.14/03799	Mr & Mrs P B Oldfield
	O/07298/LPS3.14/03800	Mr Laurence Sims
	O/07299/LPS3.14/03801	Mr & Mrs A Lambert
	O/10609/LPS3.14/05361	Mrs L Roberts

### Primary Issues

- 3.AS14.1 ● Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.

- Are there reasons, based on environmental, social infrastructure, agricultural and traffic safety grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
- Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site and given the development land supply position, can its allocation for housing purposes prior to 2001 be justified.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS14.2 In regard to the first primary issue, this is a large arable field situated on the northern side of the village of Lymm. To the west and south there is housing. To the east, beyond Reddish Lane, is an area consisting mostly of farmland with further housing to its south and east. On the northern side the allocation site is bordered by an embankment carrying the Trans-Pennine Trail which is a major pedestrian/cycle way occupying the route of a former railway; beyond that is open countryside.

3.AS14.3 This site is in itself open in nature and, together with the series of fields directly to the east, it gives clear definition to the built-up edge of the village. However it does not, in my opinion, have the appearance of open countryside. From several vantage points it is seen against the backdrop of residential properties to the west and south; the housing to the south-east, on the far side of Rushgreen Road, adds to this urbanising influence since it is separated from the allocation site by only a narrow segment of farmland. And, significantly, along the northern boundary the embankment represents an appreciable visual and physical barrier. These features, in combination, create a noticeable measure of containment around the allocation land. As such there is a distinct contrast, in terms of character and appearance, between this Area of Search and the extensive stretch of open countryside beyond the former railway.

3.AS14.4 A major point argued by most Objectors is that this site should be protected as part of the open gap which they say must be maintained between the communities of Lymm and Oughtrington. I examine the role and value of this entire gap in more detail later when considering the merits of another proposal [see paras 3.AS15.10 - 12]. For the reasons explained there I do not believe that, in relation to this particular function, Area of Search 14 serves a purpose of any Green Belt significance. Nor is there any other reason why this site should be designated as Green Belt. If development were eventually to be permitted here it would be well contained by the northern boundary feature and would not represent an encroachment into open countryside; close integration with the established built-up area could easily be achieved. I recognise that the rest of the open land directly south of the Trans-Pennine Trail could be vulnerable to the further spread of development since it compares favourably with the allocation site in terms of character and appearance and the boundary between these 2 areas is not especially strong, comprising as it does only a very narrow lane. However the additional land in question is not countryside as such, nor is it vital that it should be kept permanently open as I shall explain later [see paras 3.5.132 - 138]; moreover any such development would be contained within well-established confines and accordingly would not have the appearance of an unrestricted sprawl.

3.AS14.5 Overall, given the foregoing circumstances and my earlier comments generally about the need to identify certain sites for safeguarding notwithstanding their Green Belt potential [see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4], the Council's decision not to designate the Reddish Lane land as part of the proposed Green Belt is entirely justified.

3.AS14.6 As to the second issue, most Objectors are concerned about the impact which any future development of this site would have on the character of Lymm, particularly when considering the number of other Areas of Search which the Local Plan identifies around the periphery of this village. I have already concluded that the Council's overall approach regarding the distribution of the various Areas of Search around the Borough is soundly based [see paras 3.3.4 + 5]. As for Lymm, this is a substantial and fairly widespread settlement. It has a sizeable centre providing a relatively wide range of shops and services and elsewhere within its confines there are educational, recreational, social and other such facilities as well as numerous business premises. Also, communications with the surrounding major highway network, including the motorway system, are good. It is therefore not surprising that in general terms this should be regarded by the Local Plan as an appropriate focus for possible longer-term development opportunities.

3.AS14.7 Regarding Area of Search 14, if this were eventually released for development it would represent only a very small-scale addition to the present built form of this village. I have already explained how well contained any such development would be and am confident that a scheme could easily be designed to fit in with the general pattern of existing housing hereabouts. Hence no material harm to the character and appearance of these immediate surroundings should necessarily arise, nor should Lymm in general terms suffer any loss of identity. Furthermore there is no evidence of inadequacies in the social infrastructure to suggest that the resultant extra population could not be satisfactorily accommodated within the community.

3.AS14.8 As for agricultural land considerations, this site is classified as Grade 2 and therefore of the best and most versatile quality which national guidance aims to protect from development. My general comments about this matter are reported elsewhere [see paras 3.AS1.8 - 11]. These are relevant in the present case. Moreover I have already concluded that there are no sound Green Belt reasons for resisting the Local Plan allocation and my analysis of the second primary issue demonstrates that no other cogent objections to the possible future development of this site apply. Thus the "agricultural land quality" argument, which I observe is not raised by MAFF, stands alone on this occasion. Yet against this is compelling evidence of a need to identify a considerable reserve of land for safeguarding purposes as my conclusions on Policy LPS3 confirm. This, in the circumstances, is the overwhelming consideration here.

3.AS14.9 While many Objectors express fears about the likelihood of highway safety problems arising, no technical evidence is presented to verify this argument. The Council's assessment is that although there are limitations in the immediate surrounding road system, these could be overcome with suitable highway improvements. Thus there appears to be nothing in principle to preclude the development of the allocation land.

3.AS14.10 Turning to the third primary issue, **Mr Morris** proposes that Area of Search 14 should be allocated for housing purposes immediately. His case is based largely on the



need to address the shortfall which there is in such provision during the remainder of the Local Plan period and on the particular need which he says there is for additional development land in Lymm.

3.AS14.11 From my examination under Policy LPS2 of the Borough-wide development land supply position during the period to 2001 and in the immediate short term beyond I am convinced that while there is a shortfall in housing provision against strategic requirements, this can be satisfactorily remedied without the need to bring the present site forward at this stage. There are other more acceptable sources of additional supply which I am recommending for adoption.

3.AS14.12 Nor is there a compelling case for extra provision in Lymm. The Local Plan cannot reasonably address the question of housing land supply from such a narrow perspective. There is no firm evidence to suggest that Lymm is a self-contained housing market area and no reliable means by which an appropriate or "required" level of provision could be established. As the Council says, this is a dormitory settlement whose population depends to a noticeable degree on employment opportunities elsewhere. Given the form and content of CSP Policy H1 which sets out the strategic requirement for Warrington and the guidance in PPG3 about translating such policies in Local Plans and ensuring adequate land availability, I consider that this matter must be approached on a Borough-wide basis.

3.AS14.13 I acknowledge that Lymm is one of the 2 largest villages in this Borough and have already explained why it is logical to expect that a comparatively greater proportion of the total future development provision should be made here rather than in the smaller settlements [see para 3.3.5]. However the fact that in terms of the percentage increase in housing stock Lymm will not, based on current figures, have experienced the same level of growth over the CSP term as Appleton Thorn or in particular Culcheth (the other of the largest villages) is not, contrary to Mr Morris' belief, too significant. And to imply that the Local Plan should now seek to rectify this situation by increasing Lymm's contribution to the short-term land supply so as to compare more favourably with, say, Culcheth is wrong; this would be to ignore, or at least give insufficient weight to, other material factors such as environmental and infrastructure constraints which necessarily must influence appreciably the site-selection process.

3.AS14.14 Also, although it is clear from the information presented by the Objector and from the Council's housing land availability statement that housebuilding opportunities in Lymm during the remaining years of the Plan can be expected to be limited, there is no cause for concern. While unintentional, my recommendations for improving the Borough-wide housing land supply will, if adopted, have the effect of enhancing prospects in Lymm since 2 of the 4 Areas of Search (nos 16 and 21) which I say should be brought forward immediately for development lie within this settlement as does a further newly-allocated site (Millers Lane, Oughtrington). Consequently the Objector's anxiety about what he sees as Lymm's disadvantaged position due to a marked imbalance in the distribution and variety of sites which are available within the Plan period should be comfortably overcome.

3.AS14.15 In terms of the site-specific factors (such as accessibility, proximity to shops/services, absence of environmental harm and availability of infrastructure) to which Mr Morris refers, I accept that these generally indicate the suitability of the allocation land for

housing development purposes. However equally they demonstrate its suitability for safeguarding under the provisions of Policy LPS3 as my conclusions on the second primary issue confirm.

3.AS14.16 In all the circumstances and bearing in mind my conclusions under Policy LPS3 on the longer-term land supply position, I find no reason to question the Local Plan allocation for this site. Not only is this Area of Search entirely appropriate in its own right but also it is further justified by reason of its relationship with the land to the east which, as I explain later in this report [*see paras 3.5.132 -138*], has similar potential.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS14.17 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to these objections.

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## Area of Search 15 - Land between Lymm and Oughtrington

OBJECTIONS - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (page 51)

*[Headnote: The following issues and conclusions do not relate to those parts of Area of Search 15 which were, as part of the Proposed Changes, allocated individually as Areas of Search 20 and 21; for ease of reference the objections regarding those Areas are reported later under their own policy headings.]*

### Primary Issues

- 3.AS15.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on environmental, agricultural, social infrastructure and highway safety grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Given the housing land supply position and site-specific considerations, is there justification for the allocation of part of the Area of Search to the south of the Bridgewater Canal for housing development prior to 2001.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS15.2 As to the first issue, this is the largest of the Areas of Search originally identified in the Deposit Draft Plan. At the Proposed Changes stage, in response to objections from **Lymm Parish Council, Oughtrington Community Association, Heatley Residents Association, Warrington Liberal Democrats, the Federation of Cheshire Green Parties, MAFF** and numerous local residents, the allocation of the major part of this site was deleted by the Borough Council and the land was designated instead as part of the Green Belt. This has led to a counter-objection from **Linson Construction Ltd.**

3.AS15.3 This site which is largely in agricultural use effectively comprises 2 parts divided by the Bridgewater Canal. The northern section is surrounded on 3 sides by housing and associated development; it is gently undulating and is virtually all at a noticeably lower level than the canal. On the other hand the southern section is only adjoined by development of any significance on its western side although there are short ribbons of housing fronting Longbutt Lane and Oughtrington Lane to the south and east respectively; this land for the most part rises quite steeply away from the canal.

3.AS15.4 To my mind there is a distinct contrast between the character and appearance of these 2 parts. The extent and depth of development around the northern section creates a noticeable sense of containment; the low-lying nature of the ground and the various belts of trees within and around this part of the site enhance this effect. From many public vantage points this section is seen against a backdrop of buildings which has a marked urbanising influence on these immediate surroundings. Accordingly, it makes a much less dramatic and conspicuous contribution to the open landscape hereabouts than the southern section which, due to its landform, scale and appearance, clearly forms an integral part of the wider area of rural countryside to the east of Lymm.

3.AS15.5 On this basis there seems to be no compelling reason why the northern section needs to be kept permanently open; certainly any limited Green Belt value which, by virtue of its openness, it may be deemed to possess is far outweighed by the advantages of its allocation for safeguarding for possible longer-term development purposes. My views on the appropriateness of the Council's general approach regarding the need to safeguard certain sites notwithstanding their Green Belt potential are explained elsewhere in this report [*see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4*]. In the present case Area of Search 15, even on the reduced scale which I intend recommending, would remain one of the larger safeguarded sites in the Local Plan; I estimate its size to be in the order of 23ha. Therefore it would, in terms of potential development capacity, make an important contribution to the overall provision of such land and would add welcome variety to the range of sites.

3.AS15.6 Furthermore the likely environmental impact of any possible future development on this section would be within acceptable limits. It would be well integrated with the surrounding areas of housing and be comfortably contained by the canal and the trees which border it particularly along the southern bank. Development to the east and west already extends to the canalside; what I am proposing would be entirely consistent with this established pattern.

3.AS15.7 In the circumstances I conclude that it is only the southern section which performs any significant Green Belt functions, primarily helping both to check the unrestricted sprawl of the adjoining built-up area and to safeguard the countryside from encroachment. If this land were to remain as part of the Area of Search as **Linson Construction** suggests, and eventually be brought forward for development, this would represent a major expansion of the village into a most attractive, sensitive and prominent stretch of countryside causing serious harm to its character and appearance. Its permanent protection as open land is thus entirely justified.

3.AS15.8 In reaching this conclusion I have also taken into account the longer-term development land supply position. From my analysis of this matter under Policy LPS3 I am satisfied that there is simply no need to allocate this southern section as an Area of Search; anticipated strategic requirements can be met from more acceptable alternative sources either already allocated in the Plan or recommended by me for adoption.

3.AS15.9 Additionally I acknowledge that the Council does not dispute **Linson Construction's** claim that there are no insurmountable technical or ownership constraints relating to this site and that it is therefore genuinely available for development. However the "Green Belt argument" is overwhelming.

3.AS15.10 A major point of objection to the Deposit Draft Plan allocation which is raised by most local residents and organisations relates to the need, as they see it, to preserve the open gap between Lymm and Oughtrington in order to protect the identity and character of each of these communities. This in fact is one of the main reasons advanced by the Council for its subsequent decision to delete the Area of Search and designate this land as Green Belt.

3.AS15.11 I recognise the strength of local feeling which there is that these are separate settlements which should not be allowed to merge. However in physical, land-use terms the picture is quite different. Lymm is a very large village. It has a sizeable and well-defined centre with a range of shops and services; the surrounding built-up area extends for some distance in all directions. To the north-east Rushgreen Road is the major route out of the centre. Initially there is development in depth along both sides; there is then a stretch where farmland extends up to the northern frontage before housing again appears, this being the area known as Oughtrington. Yet along the southern side of Rushgreen Road there is virtually continuous development and visually there is no impression of any significant gap. It is also evident that Oughtrington has no recognised centre of its own; there are a few scattered shops and services only. In my opinion Oughtrington has the appearance of, and functions as, an outlying part of Lymm with which it is linked physically and, apparently, socially.

3.AS15.12 In these circumstances I do not consider that the allocation land represents the sort of open gap between settlements which warrants the level of protection afforded by a Green Belt designation. For the avoidance of any doubt those particular views apply just as much to the southern section of the original Area of Search; however unlike the northern section it does serve other valuable Green Belt purposes as my earlier conclusions explain.

3.AS15.13 The Council also argues (in relation to **Linson Construction's** case) that Area of Search 15 is a significant part of the strategic gap between Warrington and Manchester. However it contradicts itself when rejecting a similar claim by **Mr Hoesli**. In any event I

disagree with this proposition. This particular gap is already interrupted by the substantial presence of Lymm/Oughtrington. Development of the allocation land, if it were to arise, would have the effect of consolidating the existing built-up area between its established east-west limits; it would not extend it closer to either Warrington or Manchester. Therefore the recognised gap between these towns would remain unchanged.

3.AS15.14 For all these reasons, and given my conclusions on the remaining primary issues, I shall not endorse the Council's Proposed Changes (part of LPS3-a and b, and LPS5-h) in full. Only insofar as they relate to the designation of the southern section as part of the Green Belt do they merit support. In this regard I am satisfied that the canal and the bankside trees provide a firm and defensible boundary to the designated area.

3.AS15.15 Bearing in mind my decision to recommend the designation of the southern section of Area of Search 15 as Green Belt I shall confine my consideration of the second primary issue to the remaining northern section.

3.AS15.16 A fundamental argument raised by most Objectors is that the scale of development which Area of Search 15 would be capable of accommodating would be out of keeping in this location and be environmentally harmful to both Lymm and Oughtrington, and to their settings. To a large extent I have dealt with this argument under the first primary issue. Given my previous conclusions, I am satisfied that not only is there no case for designating the northern section as Green Belt, but also there is no reason on environmental grounds why it should not be safeguarded for possible future development. I accept that even though my recommendations have the effect of reducing the scale of the original Area of Search by more than 50%, a sizeable site would still remain available for longer-term consideration. Yet Lymm/Oughtrington is a very large settlement well capable of absorbing satisfactorily the amount of development which potentially this area of land could accommodate; and on a more localised level the close relationship of this site with surrounding housing, and its well-contained nature, should help ensure that any scheme could be easily and fully integrated with the established built-up area. In short, the general character and appearance of this settlement, and its rural setting, would not be demonstrably harmed.

3.AS15.17 Concern is expressed by many, including the Borough Council, that Lymm has hitherto grown in an incremental fashion with only small-scale additions to its built form. However the continued expansion of this settlement in that way would not necessarily be precluded by the safeguarding of the northern section; there seems to be no reason why the IUDP, if it were to decide to bring this land forward, should not include provisions for some sort of phasing of development in this case provided there were sufficient justification for such an approach.

3.AS15.18 On agricultural grounds there are objections from MAFF and a number of local residents. Much of the northern section is of the best and most versatile quality. Basically therefore national guidance is against its development. My general comments about this matter are reported elsewhere [see paras 3.AS1.8 - 11]. These are relevant to the present case. Furthermore I have already concluded that there are no sound Green Belt reasons for changing the Deposit Draft Plan allocation for this land and my analysis of the second primary issue demonstrates that there are no other cogent objections to the possible future

development of this site. Thus the "agricultural land quality" argument stands alone on this occasion. Yet against this is compelling evidence of a need to identify a considerable reserve of land for safeguarding purposes as my conclusions on the longer-term housing provision situation under Policy LPS3 confirm. This, in the circumstances, is the overwhelming consideration here.

3.AS15.19 As for social infrastructure, I have earlier described the size and nature of Lymm's village centre [see para 3.AS14.6]; elsewhere within the built-up area there are educational, recreational, social and other such facilities as well as numerous business premises. I am told that bus services through the village, including along Rushgreen Road, are good. And clearly communications from this site to the surrounding major highway network would be relatively quick and easy.

3.AS15.20 While several local residents assert that problems would arise in relation to the provision of a number of such facilities and services if development of this Area of Search were eventually to occur, there is no firm evidence to support those arguments. I observe that the Council raises no such issues in its rejection of **Linson Construction's** case for safeguarding the whole of the original Area of Search.

3.AS15.21 Much the same can be said regarding the highway safety objections raised by many local residents. There is no technical evidence to demonstrate that insurmountable congestion or safety problems would be likely to arise. In fact several Objectors express particular concern about roads to the south and east of Area of Search 15; the designation of the southern section as Green Belt, in accordance with my recommendations, will significantly reduce the likelihood of additional traffic being attracted to these roads. As for the northern section, direct access on to Rushgreen Road (A6144) which is a major route through Lymm/Oughtrington would appear to be available at 2 points; both are identified on a development concept plan prepared by **Linson Construction** against which the Council has raised no overriding highways-related argument. One of the access points would need to be inter-related with the development of Area of Search 21 but this is something which is within the powers of the Council to negotiate on and to secure. In any event all matters concerning highway capacity, access arrangements and so on, insofar as these reflect on the suitability and availability of any Area of Search for development, would be considered in detail as part of the IUDP process. In the present case the evidence available to me does not preclude the allocation of the northern section as one such Area.

3.AS15.22 In all the circumstances I believe that in relation to the northern section the Council's original thoughts as expressed in the Deposit Draft Plan were correct. This is an entirely suitable site for safeguarding.

3.AS15.23 Turning to the third primary issue, **Mr Waheed** proposes that an area of land on the southern side of the Bridgewater Canal should be allocated for housing development prior to 2001. Contrary to the Objector's claim, there is no pressing need to allow this land to come forward for development; as my analysis under Policy LPS2 of the Borough-wide housing land supply position demonstrates, strategic requirements can be met from other more acceptable sources either already identified/allocated in the Local Plan or recommended by me for adoption. In terms of the alleged local need for further housing land in Lymm it is inappropriate for the Plan to address this issue from such a narrow perspective; my reasons

are set out in my conclusions on Area of Search 14 [see para 3.AS14.12] where a similar point arises. As to the Objector's reference to the need for affordable housing, provision for this sort of accommodation could easily be made elsewhere in the Borough as necessary. Local Plan Policy HR3 is designed to achieve this.

3.AS15.24 Nor are there site-specific grounds which support the release of the objection land. This is open ground which lies in a conspicuous position at the canal side; it adjoins housing to the west but the boundaries to the south and east are weak and indefensible, and thus wholly inappropriate for the purposes of defining the inner edge of the Green Belt. This site forms an important part of the stretch of attractive countryside to the south of the canal which I have earlier described in detail. Development here would be a noticeable and illogical encroachment into this sensitive open area seriously detracting from the character and appearance of these surroundings.

3.AS15.25 Mr Pawson seeks the immediate allocation of land in the same vicinity. His proposal concerns a relatively narrow strip of land which borders the established built-up area and extends southwards from Sutch Lane to Longbutt Lane. This is largely a mixture of open ground and woodland but includes one residence. This land too forms an integral part of the area of countryside south of the canal which, for the reasons explained already, it is vital to protect from development. The settlement boundary hereabouts is well defined. Any eastward expansion of the built-up area as now envisaged by the Objector would seriously spoil the character and appearance of these immediate surroundings and, because of the absence of any significant outer boundary feature, yet further encroachment into the countryside would be difficult to resist.

3.AS15.26 While Mr Pawson raises no serious "housing need" argument, I would confirm that my views on this subject as expressed in the preceding case apply equally in the present instance.

3.AS15.27 In addition this Objector puts forward an alternative proposal embracing broadly the same strip of land but including also the western part of Mr Waheed's site. This, it is suggested, should be allocated as an Area of Search. On site-specific grounds this proposal has no merit; the arguments relating to the other proposals covered under the third primary issue apply here. Nor in terms of the need for housing land in the longer term can a case be made for the allocation of this land for safeguarding as my conclusions on Linson Construction's proposition for the southern section of Area of Search 15 (which includes the site now in question) amply demonstrate [see para 3.AS15.8]. There is an associated objection proposal submitted by Mr Pawson for the provision of a road between Pepper Street/Sutch Lane and Longbutt Lane and this is reported under the Transportation policies chapter heading.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS15.28 That:

- (i) no modification be made to the Plan in respect of that part of Area of Search 15 lying to the north of the Bridgewater Canal as shown

on the Proposals Map (but excluding the land comprising Area of Search 21 as described in the Proposed Changes document);

- (ii) the Proposals Map be modified by the deletion of that part of Area of Search 15 lying to the south of the Bridgewater Canal (but excluding the land comprising Area of Search 20 as described in the Proposed Changes document);
- (iii) the Proposals Map be modified by the designation of land between the Bridgewater Canal and Oughtrington Lane currently comprising the southern section of Area of Search 15 (but excluding the land comprising Area of Search 20 as described in the Proposed Changes document) as Green Belt;
- (iv) Policy LPS3 be modified by amending the specified size of Area of Search 15 to take into account (i) and (ii) above;
- (v) no modification be made to the Plan in response to objections 5996 (Mr Waheed) and 7092 and 16745 (Mr Pawson).

### Area of Search 16 - Lakeside Road, Lymm

OBJECTIONS:	O/01658/LPS3.16/00708 O/05805/LPS3.16/02882 O/07096/LPS3.16/03708 O/07172/LPS3.16/03744 O/07218/LPS3.16/03770 O/07223/LPS3.16/03771 O/10611/LPS3.16/05361	N M & F Follina Allen Homes (North West) Ltd B G Hasprey D J Gorrie Mr B T Faulkner Mrs R Faulkner Mrs L Roberts
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### Primary Issues

- 3.AS16.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on environmental, ecological, social infrastructure and traffic safety grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site and given the development land supply position, can its allocation for housing purposes prior to 2001 be justified.



## Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS16.2 Regarding the first issue, the allocation site comprises a large, arable field which is adjoined by housing on 3 sides with farmland to the south; the built-up area of Lymm village extends to the north and west. Despite its size and nature, this site to my mind does not possess the characteristic of openness; at least not to the extent that it would make a useful contribution to the proposed Green Belt in terms of helping serve the acknowledged purposes of designation as described in PPG2. The surrounding building development exerts a strong urbanising influence on the character and appearance of the allocation land. This also presents an extensive backdrop against which this site is seen from all but a few public vantage points and creates a noticeable sense of enclosure. These characteristics contrast markedly with the evident openness of the countryside to the south which the Local Plan designates as Green Belt.

3.AS16.3 Even though the hedgerow along the southern edge of this field is not a particularly strong or visually dominant feature, it does clearly mark the division between these 2 areas of contrasting character and in all the circumstances it is appropriate to rely on this as the inner boundary of the Green Belt hereabouts.

3.AS16.4 For these reasons I cannot agree with the arguments raised by local residents who call for the inclusion of this site within the Green Belt; there is nothing of significance to justify keeping the allocation land permanently open. Accordingly, the boundary of the designated area as shown in the Local Plan should remain unaltered.

3.AS16.5 As to the second primary issue, there is a strong local feeling that any future development on this site would destroy the character of the village. I disagree. Lymm is a very large settlement. In relative terms the development of the allocation land, if this were to be allowed, would represent only a modest-sized addition to the built-up area. It would be easily capable of becoming well integrated into these immediate surroundings and would have the effect of squaring-off the existing built form of this part of the village in an entirely logical and acceptable fashion. I am aware that the area known as Lymm Dam, which is both a Conservation Area and an Area of High Landscape Value, lies nearby. However this is already separated from the allocation site by housing along Lakeside Road; thus any future development should have no significant impact on this area of special quality.

3.AS16.6 Nor are local concerns about ecological damage well founded. The allocation land has no formal nature conservation designation and there is no evidence that it contains any features of significant interest. Even so, if any such features were to be discovered then the provisions of Policies ENV1 and ENV6 should ensure that proper consideration would be given to them as part of any development scheme.

3.AS16.7 As for objections about the inadequacy of public facilities, I have described elsewhere in this report the nature and scale of Lymm's social infrastructure [see para 3.AS14.6]. On the face of it this settlement appears to be well capable of accommodating the increased population which is likely to arise from the development of the present site. However if further such provision were to be required as a direct consequence of any scheme there are, as the Council points out, several policies in the Plan which are designed to secure any necessary facilities/infrastructure.

3.AS16.8 In terms of highway considerations there is no technical evidence to substantiate residents' assertions that traffic-related problems would occur. The Council's case is that satisfactory access arrangements could be made subject to certain improvements being undertaken and there is nothing to suggest that the surrounding highway network does not have sufficient capacity to accommodate the scale of traffic which the development of this site would be likely to generate.

3.AS16.9 Lastly regarding this issue, Mr Gorrie argues that the allocation of this Area of Search conflicts with many of the Plan's specified guiding principles. Several of those he identifies correspond with matters already covered in the foregoing conclusions. In general terms however my comments expressed earlier when dealing with a similar argument raised in relation to Area of Search 8 [see para 3.AS8.13] are applicable here.

3.AS16.10 As to the third primary issue, Allen Homes (North West) Ltd maintains that the present site is, in environmental and technical terms, entirely suitable for housing purposes and that in order to help remedy a shortfall in provision against strategic requirements it should be allocated for housing development prior to 2001.

3.AS16.11 On environmental grounds a very strong case can be made for this site. I have already described how it is well contained physically and how its appearance and character are influenced markedly by the adjoining housing development. This land lies at the edge of a substantial built-up area to which it is well related in scale and development here would be likely to settle comfortably within these surroundings without causing any measurable harm. Also it is within fairly easy reach, including by cyclists and pedestrians, of the village centre which provides a reasonable range of shops and services. And although there appear to be only limited employment opportunities within Lymm, this site is not too remote from major employment areas on the outskirts of Warrington; the M6/M56 interchange is also quite near giving quick and convenient access to opportunities further afield.

3.AS16.12 As for infrastructure and other technical considerations, there is no evidence of any insurmountable constraints, as my conclusions on the second primary issue help demonstrate, such as to prevent the development of this site being commenced within the Plan period.

3.AS16.13 The principal argument raised by the Council against Allen Homes' proposition appears to be that there is no need, based on housing land supply considerations, to bring this Area of Search forward for immediate development. However my assessment under Policy LPS2 of the current position identifies an urgent need to make further provision for housing within this Plan in order to meet strategic requirements up to 2001 and to ensure the maintenance of a 5 years' land supply covering the short-term period beyond.

3.AS16.14 Given those circumstances, and bearing in mind my conclusions on the site-specific considerations, I firmly believe that it is both necessary and appropriate to allocate this Area of Search for development at the present time. Moreover, in forming this opinion I have not judged this site in isolation. In order to deal with this issue fully and equitably I have taken into account the respective merits of the other Areas of Search. However apart from nos 1, 8 and 21 which I am similarly recommending for immediate allocation none measures up to the Lakeside Road site.

3.AS16.15 There is no dispute between Allen Homes and the Council that the site could accommodate some 100 dwellings; although consistent with my conclusions about notional housing densities [see paras 3.3.32 + 33], I would encourage the parties to examine at a later stage of the planning process the scope for improving on this level of provision, in view of this agreement I see no reason to recommend formally at this time any higher capacity figure.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS16.16 That:

- (i) the Plan be modified by the deletion from Policy LPS3 of Area of Search 16 and by the inclusion of this site instead as a development allocation under the provisions of Policy LPS2 with a specified capacity of 100 housing units;
- (ii) the Proposals Map be modified accordingly.

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## Area of Search 17 - Warrington Road, Statham

<p>OBJECTIONS:</p> <p>O-PC/11572/LPS3.17/00016  O-PC/11399/LPS3.17/00670  O/01659/LPS3.17/00708  O-PC/11429/LPS3.17/02854  O-PC/11405/LPS3.17/03702  O-PC/11400/LPS3.17/03703  O/07089/LPS3.17/03704  O/07097/LPS3.17/03708  O-PC/11288/LPS3.17/03708  O-PC/11412/LPS3.17/03723  O/07219/LPS3.17/03770  O/07224/LPS3.17/03771  O-PC/16399/LPS3.17/03969  O/10612/LPS3.17/05361</p> <p><u>Conditionally Withdrawn</u>  O/00003/LPS5/00002  (part reported)</p>	<p>Mr Ian G Marks  Cllr Mrs Sheila Woodyatt  N M &amp; F Follina  CPRE  Mr L E Seaborn  Margaret Seaborn  Ms P M McCulloch  B G Hasprey  B G Hasprey  Mr D M Paton-Williams  Mr B T Faulkner  Mrs R Faulkner  Lymm Parish Council  Mrs L Roberts</p> <p>Walker family</p>
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## Primary Issues

- 3.AS17.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site (as shown in the Deposit Draft Plan) and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on environmental and social infrastructure grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Given the nature and characteristics of land to the west of Area of Search 17 (as identified in the Proposed Changes document) and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on environmental, social infrastructure and traffic safety grounds, why this additional land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS17.2 As to the first primary issue, the Area of Search defined in the Deposit Draft Plan is a relatively narrow stretch of open pasture on the western edge of the built-up area of Statham. To the east are school grounds with housing beyond. On the southern side is a former railway cutting which now forms part of the Trans-Pennine Trail, a long distance pedestrian/cycle way; there is housing further on. Adjoining to the west are open fields although not too far away is the massive structure of the Thelwall Viaduct which carries the M6 motorway. Warrington Road marks the northern boundary of the allocation site; on the opposite side is a field identified in the Local Plan as Area of Search 18.

3.AS17.3 The present site is small in scale and, because of its configuration and close relationship with the built-up areas to the east and south, it plays only a very limited role as part of the open countryside around this side of the settlement. The substantial belt of trees and other vegetation along the western boundary, which tends to separate this land from the fields beyond, reinforces this view. And the future development of Area of Search 18 (which allocation I intend endorsing), if that were to occur, would create yet more of a sense of enclosure around the Warrington Road site.

3.AS17.4 In these circumstances there is no justification for keeping the allocation land permanently open since it does not serve significantly any of the Green Belt purposes described in PPG2. If development were eventually to be permitted here it would be limited in scale and well contained by the established outer boundary features; it would not appear as an uncontrolled sprawl into the open countryside.

3.AS17.5 Overall, given these conclusions and my earlier comments generally about the need to identify certain sites for safeguarding notwithstanding their Green Belt potential [*see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4*], I reject the call by several local residents for the inclusion of the original Area of Search 17 in the designated area.

3.AS17.6 In respect of the second issue, those same Objectors claim that development on the allocation land would destroy the character of the settlement and could not be adequately served by existing public facilities. However Statham is part of the village of Lymm whose scale and nature I have previously described [see para 3.AS14.6]. The development of this site, if it were eventually to occur, would represent only a very small-scale addition which would have no material impact on the character and appearance of even the immediate surroundings (as my conclusions on the first primary issue confirm) let alone the settlement as a whole. Also I am confident that the village centre and the rest of Lymm's social infrastructure would be well capable of accommodating the demands of the increased population which would be likely to arise from any such development. In any event, as the Council points out, several policies within the Local Plan are aimed at securing the provision of additional services and facilities where the need arises directly from new development schemes. In these circumstances there is no good reason for deleting this Plan allocation.

3.AS17.7 Regarding the third primary issue one of the original objections, from the **Walker family**, sought the enlargement of Area of Search 17 based on the need to provide more housing land and in order to provide a more appropriate development site. At the Proposed Changes stage the Council extended the allocation to include the field to the west. This led to counter-objections from **Lymm Parish Council**, the **CPRE** and a number of **local residents**. To my mind their case for the reinstatement of this site as Green Belt is well founded.

3.AS17.8 The extension in itself is larger than the original allocation site. It is less well related to the built-up area not least since the housing to the south of the Trans-Pennine Trail does not extend so far westwards as this site. Not only is there accordingly no noticeable measure of containment on the southern side but, importantly, neither is there any to the west since the field boundary here comprises only a fairly sparse line of trees. Thus to my mind the extension, by reason of its scale and nature and the absence of any significant boundary feature on its western side in particular, is an integral part of the area of countryside surrounding this settlement and makes an important contribution to the sense of openness hereabouts.

3.AS17.9 If this additional land were safeguarded and eventually developed it would represent a noticeable encroachment into the relatively narrow open area between Statham and the Thelwall Viaduct; and in turn it would reduce the gap to Thelwall village which lies just beyond the motorway. Also the Green Belt boundary would be much less well-defined or defensible (in comparison with the Deposit Draft Plan proposal) and consequently the further spread of development into this sensitive gap might become more difficult to resist.

3.AS17.10 I accept the Borough Council's general point about the need to safeguard a substantial reserve of land in order to help meet anticipated longer-term development needs; however from my assessment of the land supply position under Policy LPS3 I am satisfied that this can be achieved from other more acceptable sources, either identified in the Plan or recommended by me for adoption, without the need to allocate the present site as an extension to Area of Search 17.

3.AS17.11 As to the fourth primary issue, several **local residents** raise similar points to those described in the second issue; **Lymm Parish Council** supports the environmental

arguments. I again take the view that no serious social infrastructure problems would be likely to arise as a result of the scale of housing which the extended site would be capable of accommodating. Nor is there any convincing evidence that traffic safety standards would be reduced; the main highway network in this area, which includes Warrington Road to which this site would have access, appears from my observations to have the capacity to absorb the relatively small increase in vehicular activity which any future development scheme would be likely to generate. Also the character of this settlement as a whole would not be seriously affected. Even if it were to be extended, Area of Search 17 would still represent a fairly small-scale peripheral addition to what is a very large village.

3.AS17.12 The only argument to which I would subscribe concerns the more localised impact on these immediate surroundings. The nature and scale of any future development would be such as to harm significantly the appearance and character of this stretch of open countryside, spoiling the setting of Statham by drawing the built-up area yet closer towards the Thelwall Viaduct. This reinforces my conclusion that this piece of land should be reinstated as part of the proposed Green Belt.

3.AS17.13 Therefore in all the circumstances I shall endorse the Deposit Draft Plan allocation but not the Proposed Changes (part of LPS3-a and b, and LPS5-i).

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS17.14 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to these objections nor in relation to Proposed Changes LPS3-a (part) and LPS3-b (part) insofar as they relate to Area of Search 17, or LPS5-i.

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### Area of Search 18 - Pool Lane, Statham

<p>OBJECTIONS:</p> <p>O/01583/LPS3.18/00673</p> <p>O/01660/LPS3.18/00708</p> <p>O-PC/11430/LPS3.18/02854</p> <p>O-PC/11406/LPS3.18/03702</p> <p>O-PC/11401/LPS3.18/03703</p> <p>O/07090/LPS3.18/03704</p> <p>O/07098/LPS3.18/03708</p> <p>O-PC/11289/LPS3.18/03708</p> <p>O-PC/11413/LPS3.18/03723</p> <p>O/01582/LPS5/00673</p> <p><u>Conditionally Withdrawn</u></p> <p>O/00003/LPS5/00002</p> <p>(part reported)</p>	<p>Mr Peter Broadsmith</p> <p>N M &amp; F Follina</p> <p>CPRE</p> <p>Mr L E Seaborn</p> <p>Margaret Seaborn</p> <p>Ms P M McCulloch</p> <p>B G Hasprey</p> <p>B G Hasprey</p> <p>Mr D M Paton-Williams</p> <p>Mr Peter Broadsmith</p> <p>Walker family</p>
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## Primary Issues

- 3.AS18.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site (as shown in the Deposit Draft Plan) and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on environmental and social infrastructure grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Given the nature and characteristics of land to the north of Area of Search 18 (as identified in the Proposed Changes document) and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on environmental, social infrastructure and traffic safety grounds, why this additional land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS18.2 Regarding the first issue, the allocated site as defined in the Deposit Draft Plan consists mainly of open farmland but also includes a group of farm buildings and cottages as well as one other residential property; all these lie close to the western boundary which is formed by Pool Lane. The open land beyond this road partly comprises hotel grounds and just further on is the massive structure of the Thelwall Viaduct which carries the M6 motorway. On the eastern side is the built-up area of Statham, while to the north and south are mainly open fields; one of these, beyond Warrington Road which marks the southern site boundary, is allocated by the Plan as Area of Search 17.

3.AS18.3 The allocation land, because of its scale and nature, is generally open in character and appearance; as such it contributes to the countryside fringe around this side of the settlement. However Pool Lane, together with the various residential, agricultural and commercial buildings which stand alongside it and the roadside trees and hedgerows, tends to divide this site from the open land to the west and north, and creates a noticeable sense of enclosure. Warrington Road reinforces this impression as does the backdrop of housing to the east.

3.AS18.4 In these circumstances, contrary to the views of **N M & F Follina**, **Ms McCulloch** and **Mr Hasprey**, I see no merit in the designation of the allocation land as part of the Green Belt. Development of this site, if it were eventually to occur, would not amount to an uncontrolled sprawl into open countryside but would have the effect of rounding-off, up to the firm and defensible boundary which Pool Lane provides, what is at present a somewhat ragged and indistinct edge to the built-up area. As things stand this site serves no appreciable Green Belt purpose and its permanent protection as open land cannot reasonably be justified. My earlier observations about the need generally to identify certain sites for safeguarding notwithstanding their Green Belt potential [*see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4*] bear out this conclusion.

3.AS18.5 As for the second primary issue certain Objectors raise precisely the same points as in the case of Area of Search 17. Correspondingly my comments in rejection of their arguments on that occasion [see para 3.AS17.6] apply equally in regard to the Pool Lane site.

3.AS18.6 In terms of the third issue, at the Deposit Draft stage **Mr Broadsmith** and the **Walker family** sought the enlargement of Area of Search 18. In response, the Council agreed and the Proposed Changes document includes the extension of the allocation site to include a piece of largely open land directly to the north. On environmental grounds there is a compelling case to be made for this change. This additional area is, like the original allocation, bounded by Pool Lane and adjoined by residential properties. Thus it is well contained and, being so relatively small in scale, contributes in itself very little to this open countryside fringe; similarly it has no particular value in Green Belt terms. This piece of land relates extremely well to the original Area of Search and accordingly deserves to be treated, for Local Plan purposes, in just the same way. I therefore reject the calls by the CPRE and certain local residents for the reinstatement of this site within the proposed Green Belt.

3.AS18.7 As to the final primary issue, there are counter-objections from a number of local residents based on much the same arguments as those relating to the extension to Area of Search 17. For the same reasons as previously explained [see para 3.AS17.11] I do not consider that any insurmountable social infrastructure problems would be likely to arise in the event that the additional land at Pool Lane were brought forward for development. Furthermore in terms of traffic safety, there is no convincing evidence of potential difficulties arising. The Council's case that a satisfactory means of access to Warrington Road could be achieved, either via an improved junction with Pool Lane or by a new arrangement through the remainder of the Area of Search, has gone unchallenged. Nor is it conceivable that the very small-scale extension to the built-up area which this further allocation represents would have any impact on the character and setting of the overall settlement, while even from a much more localised perspective any effect on these immediate surroundings would be quite limited.

3.AS18.8 For all these reasons I shall recommend the adoption of both the Deposit Draft Plan allocation and the Proposed Changes (parts of LPS3-a and b, and LPS5-j).

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS18.9 That:

- (i) no modification be made to the Plan in response to objections 1660 (N M and F Follina), 7090 (Ms McCulloch) and 7098 (Mr Hasprey);
- (ii) the Plan be modified by the exclusion of land at Pool Lane, Statham from the Green Belt and its allocation instead as an extension to Area of Search 18 all in accordance with Proposed Changes LPS3-a (part), LPS3-b (part) and LPS5-j.



## Area of Search 19 - Chester Road, Walton

OBJECTIONS:	O/05541/LPS3.19/02829	Walton Parish Council
	O-PC/11431/LPS3.19/02854	CPRE
	O/05969/LPS3.19/02937	Ashall Developments Ltd
	O/08097/LPS3.19/04454	J D S Appleton

### Primary Issues

- 3.AS19.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site (as shown in the Deposit Draft Plan) and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on environmental, infrastructure and agricultural grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Given the nature and characteristics of land to the west of Area of Search 19 (as identified in the Proposed Changes document) and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Having regard to the location and characteristics of Area of Search 19 and its proposed extension, and given the development land supply position, can their allocation for housing purposes prior to 2001 be justified.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS19.2 As to the first issue, the original allocation site consists of open farmland at the edge of the extensive built-up area of Lower Walton. Beyond a narrow belt of mature woodland which borders most of the eastern side of this land there is housing; further development adjoins to the south. Directly west of the identified site is a strip of farmland and then a substantial wooded area which includes a small nursery holding. The A56 dual carriageway (Chester Road) marks the northern site boundary; there are fields on the opposite side.

3.AS19.3 The allocation land is, due to its scale and nature, plainly open in character and appearance. Also, largely because of the woodland belt along the eastern side, it is not particularly well related to the built-up area but is seen rather more as part of the countryside fringe hereabouts. Yet despite those considerations I do not share the views of **Walton Parish Council** and **Mr Appleton** who say that this site should be designated as Green Belt. There are 2 main reasons for this.

3.AS19.4 First, the present land is distinctly different in nature from the extensive area of dense woodland to the west; also the dual carriageway establishes a clear division between

this site and the fields to the north. These features, combined with the tree belt and housing on the other boundaries, create a noticeable measure of self-containment. As such I do not believe that the continued exclusion of the allocation land from the proposed Green Belt would seriously weaken the designated area in this vicinity in terms of its ability to serve its acknowledged purposes. It is not therefore necessary to keep this site permanently open. Secondly, my earlier comments [see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4] about the need to identify certain sites for safeguarding notwithstanding their Green Belt potential are particularly relevant here since this is the only Area of Search, either allocated in the Plan or otherwise recommended by me for adoption, in the south-western sector of Warrington; it therefore adds welcome variety to the Borough-wide distribution of such land.

3.AS19.5 Accordingly in these circumstances, and given my conclusions on the second primary issue, I am convinced that the value of the present site as part of the Plan's reserve of safeguarded land far outweighs its potential contribution to the proposed Green Belt. The boundaries of the designated area as now intended by the Borough Council are firm and defensible; this point is explained further under the third primary issue. There is nothing to warrant their alteration.

3.AS19.6 Turning therefore to the second issue, both the **Parish Council** and **Mr Appleton** claim that the allocation land is of high amenity value and that its development would seriously spoil the appearance of these surroundings. I observe that this site has no formal landscape quality designation. Although it is quite pleasant in appearance, mostly this can, to my mind, be attributed to its setting between 2 attractive areas of woodland both of which are the subject of protective policies in the Local Plan. Even so the allocation land is prominently located beside a major route into Warrington and development here, if it were to be allowed in the future, would amount to a noticeable outward spread of the existing built-up area. However it would be visually contained, especially by the edge of the woodland to the west, thereby helping considerably to minimise the impact of any such development on this landscape. Sensitive treatment of the section closest to Chester Road would further assist in this respect; several policies in this Plan are aimed at achieving appropriate designs and layouts. In these circumstances the environmental argument raised by these Objectors is not so strong as to preclude this site from being safeguarded for future consideration for development purposes.

3.AS19.7 **Mr Appleton** expresses other concerns too but none is well founded. Regarding traffic safety considerations the Borough Council acknowledges there are limitations; however it says that access is possible on to the road system within the built-up area to the east albeit that the full development potential of the allocation site could not be realised. On drainage grounds it says that adequate provision can be made in order to serve any future scheme satisfactorily. The Objector provides no technical evidence to contradict the Council's case on infrastructure matters. As for agricultural land quality, there is no information about the formal classification. However in evidence **Ashall Developments Ltd** says that this land is not of high quality and the Council confirms there is no overriding argument on this score; I also note that MAFF has raised no objection to this Area of Search allocation.

3.AS19.8 Regarding the third primary issue, at the Proposed Changes stage the Council decided to take into the allocated area the piece of farmland directly west of the original site.

The CPRE submitted a counter-objection but raised no site-specific argument to substantiate its claim for reinstatement of the Green Belt designation. Its case is solely on more general grounds about the scale of safeguarded land Borough-wide and the Plan's approach to sustainable development issues. These matters I have already dealt with under Policy LPS3.

3.AS19.9 To my mind the Proposed Change (part of LPS3-a and b, and LPS5-b) is entirely sensible. The extra land now to be safeguarded is comparable to the original site in terms of character and appearance and deserves to be treated by the Local Plan in the same fashion. Importantly this would result in the provision of a well-defined boundary (namely the woodland edge) for the Green Belt on the western side of the Area of Search replacing the rather arbitrary line shown in the Deposit Draft Plan.

3.AS19.10 Lastly, on the fourth issue, **Ashall Developments Ltd** proposes the immediate allocation of this site for housing purposes based on current land supply considerations and its inherent suitability for such development. However my analysis under Policies LPS2 and LPS3 of the development land supply position, both during the remainder of the present Plan period and in the longer term beyond, demonstrates that there is no need to allocate this site for housing at this time; strategic requirements can be satisfactorily met from other more acceptable sources either already identified/allocated in the Plan or recommended by me for adoption. Equally though, there is clear evidence that the availability of suitable land for safeguarding is limited. On that understanding, and given my conclusions on the other primary issues in this case, it is plain that the Chester Road site would make a valuable contribution to the reserve of land from which the longer-term development needs could, if necessary, be met.

3.AS19.11 As for site-specific considerations, I recognise that this Area of Search would have certain attributes as housing land. It is at the edge of a substantial built-up area within which there is a wide range of shops, services, social facilities and employment opportunities; the district centre of Stockton Heath is within fairly easy reach. For the reasons explained in relation to the second primary issue development here would be unlikely to cause any appreciable environmental harm; additionally the Council does not dispute the Objector's claims that there are no technical constraints which make this site unsuitable in principle for housing and that it is readily capable of development. Yet all these factors also point to the suitability of this site for safeguarding, as the Local Plan intends, and there is no compelling evidence to suggest that the present allocation is inappropriate.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS19.12 That:

- (i) no modification be made to the Plan in response to objections 5541 (Walton Parish Council), 5969 (Ashall Developments Ltd) and 8097 (Mr Appleton);
- (ii) the Plan be modified by the exclusion of land at Chester Road, Walton from the Green Belt and its allocation instead as an

**extension to Area of Search 19 all in accordance with Proposed Changes LPS3-a (part), LPS3-b (part) and LPS5-b.**

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### **Area of Search 20 - Longbutt Lane/Oughttrington Lane, Lymm**

**OBJECTIONS - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (page 52)**

#### **Primary Issues**

- 3.AS20.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on environmental, social infrastructure, traffic safety and agricultural grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site and given the development land supply position, can its allocation for housing purposes prior to 2001 be justified.

#### **Inspector's Conclusions**

3.AS20.2 As for the first issue, this case concerns a large, open field at the edge of the built-up area of Lymm village. There is housing in depth to the west and south. On the eastern side, beyond Oughttrington Lane, is a ribbon of dwellings and then open countryside. Another ribbon of properties occupies about half of the length of the northern site boundary, the rest of which comprises direct frontage to Longbutt Lane. On the other side of this road is land within the southern section of Area of Search 15 the details of which are described earlier under that policy heading.

3.AS20.3 Lymm Parish Council, the CPRE and a number of local residents argue that this land should be included within the Green Belt. However to my mind it would not make a significant contribution to the designated area in terms of helping serve its acknowledged purposes. While this site is open in nature, it is almost entirely surrounded by housing; thus it does not possess the characteristics of genuine countryside. Also it is rather more closely related to the built-up settlement than to the extensive areas of open land to the north and east. In this regard even though in the Deposit Draft Plan this site is shown to be within Area of Search 15, taken in isolation it is substantially different in character from the rest of that allocated area, especially the southern section on whose merits I have already reached conclusions [see paras 3.AS15.3, 4 + 7].

3.AS20.4 From almost all public vantage points the Longbutt Lane site is largely seen against a backdrop of houses. Development here, if it were eventually to occur, would tend to consolidate and round-off this corner of the settlement and be well contained by the established surrounding features; it would certainly not amount to an uncontrolled urban sprawl into open countryside. Nor, contrary to the view which many local residents hold and regard as fundamental, would it reduce the gap between Lymm and Oughtrington; as a matter of fact any development on this land would not be materially closer to Oughtrington than the adjoining northerly edge of the present built-up area. In any event my earlier conclusions about the value of this gap [see paras 3.AS15.10 - 12] in relation to Area of Search 15 apply equally to this case.

3.AS20.5 In these circumstances, and bearing in mind my comments on the appropriateness of the Council's general approach regarding the need to safeguard certain sites notwithstanding their Green Belt potential [see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4], there is no sound reason why the allocation land should be kept permanently open. The Green Belt boundaries around this site as defined in the Local Plan (as proposed for change) are firm and defensible; they should remain unaltered.

3.AS20.6 Lastly on this issue, the **Parish Council** makes much of the planning history of this site. It is true that for more than 25 years this has been regarded for development control purposes as draft or interim Green Belt land. Understandably therefore decisions have been taken, including on appeal, against that background and the well-acknowledged, restrictive national policy has prevailed. However the task now for this Local Plan is quite different; it is to define, and proceed to adoption for the first time, the formal boundaries of the designated area around Lymm. Consequently it is both necessary and appropriate to have regard to current circumstances rather than give undue weight to past history. However it is interesting to note that on the previous occasion when the definition of the Green Belt hereabouts was under consideration, as part of the provisions of the Outer Warrington Local Plan, the Inquiry Inspector recommended in effect the allocation of the Longbutt Lane site as an Area of Search; however that Plan was never adopted.

3.AS20.7 In respect of the second primary issue, a major concern of the **Parish Council** and many local residents is that the loss of this land to development would cause serious damage to Lymm's character and identity. However Lymm (including Oughtrington) is a very large and fairly widespread settlement. The allocation site, if it were eventually released for development, would represent only a relatively small-scale addition to the present built form of this village. I have already explained how well contained any future development would be and given this factor, and the close relationship which the allocation land has with surrounding housing, there seems to be no reason why any such scheme could not be designed so as to integrate fully into this settlement. Thus no material harm to the character and appearance of these immediate surroundings would be likely to arise nor should the generally rural setting which Lymm enjoys be seriously spoilt.

3.AS20.8 There is also local concern about the pressure which further housing would put on services and facilities in the village. Similar arguments have been raised against the allocation of other Areas of Search around Lymm. In reporting on this matter in relation to Area of Search 14 I describe the scale and nature of services and facilities within this settlement [see para 3.AS14.6]. As in that case and all others where this point has been

raised, there has been no compelling evidence submitted to substantiate the residents' assertions.

3.AS20.9 Nor is there anything to suggest that their fears about traffic congestion and associated danger are well founded. The Council confirms (in relation to the third primary issue) that there is no technical objection to the development of the allocation site on these grounds. In any event this is a matter to which more detailed consideration would be given at the time of the IUDP when, as is intended, the merits of this and all other Areas of Search will be comprehensively assessed.

3.AS20.10 A number of local residents also claim that the allocation site should be protected inasmuch as it comprises high-quality agricultural land. MAFF, while expressly not objecting in this case asks nonetheless that this matter be taken into account in the future assessment of all safeguarded areas. The land at Longbutt Lane is Grade 3a quality. This is the lowest classification within the best and most versatile range which national guidance seeks to protect from development. Given my earlier conclusions on this matter in general [see paras 3.AS1.8 - 11], I am satisfied that there is no overriding basis for objection to the present allocation. Indeed PPG7 confirms that where there is a proven need for the development of agricultural land of the best and most versatile quality then the preference should be for Grade 3a land to be taken. The position adopted by MAFF supports my view on this particular case.

3.AS20.11 Regarding the third primary issue, **Linson Construction Ltd** seeks the immediate allocation of this site for housing in order to meet the shortfall of provision which there currently is, and to broaden the choice of sites. From my analysis under Policies LPS2 and LPS3 of the development land supply position, both during the remainder of the present Plan period and in the longer term beyond, I am convinced that there is no need to allocate Area of Search 20 for housing at this time. Strategic requirements can be satisfactorily met, and a wide enough range of sites provided, from other more acceptable sources either already identified/allocated in the Plan or recommended by me for adoption. Equally however there is clear evidence that the availability of suitable land for safeguarding is limited. On that understanding, and given my conclusions on the other primary issues in this case, it is plain that the Longbutt Lane site would make a valuable contribution to the reserve of land from which longer-term development needs could, if necessary, be met.

3.AS20.12 In forming this opinion I have taken into account the site-specific factors which **Linson Construction** highlights in support of its case. I accept that Lymm, in general terms, is an appropriate location for some new development; my reasons are explained earlier in this report where a similar point is dealt with in relation to Area of Search 14 [see para 3.AS14.6]. As for this particular site, I have already concluded that it is suitable for development in basic environmental terms and that no insurmountable social infrastructure or traffic-related problems would be likely to arise. In addition, the village centre is within fairly easy reach of this site, including by cyclists and pedestrians, and there are bus routes close by. Furthermore, the Council does not dispute the Objector's claim that there are no technical constraints on the development of this land; and it agrees that the provisions of PPG13 are satisfactorily met.

3.AS20.13 While these factors confirm the suitability of the Longbutt Lane site for immediate allocation for housing purposes, equally they demonstrate its appropriateness for safeguarding under the provisions of Policy LPS3. In all the circumstances there is no reason why the Local Plan's intentions for this land should be set aside.

3.AS20.14 Therefore, in order to be consistent with the approach I have taken regarding my recommendations hitherto on Area of Search 15 [see para 3.AS15.28], within which the present site lies as defined in the Deposit Draft Plan, and to accord with the Council's latest preferred proposals I shall endorse the Proposed Changes provisions (part of LPS3-a and b) in relation to the land at Longbutt Lane.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS20.15 That:

- (i) Policy LPS3 be modified by including within the list of Areas of Search the site at Longbutt Lane/Oughtrington Lane, Lymm (No 20) in accordance with Proposed Change LPS3-a (part);
- (ii) the Proposals Map be modified by redefining that part of Area of Search 15 lying to the south and west of Longbutt Lane and Oughtrington Lane respectively as Area of Search 20 in accordance with Proposed Change LPS3-b (part).

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## Area of Search 21 - Rushgreen Road, Oughtrington

OBJECTIONS - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (page 53)

### Primary Issues

- 3.AS21.1
- Given the nature and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, should it be designated as part of the Green Belt.
  - Are there reasons, based on environmental, social infrastructure and traffic safety grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site and given the development land supply position, can its allocation for housing purposes prior to 2001 be justified.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS21.2 Regarding the first primary issue, this Area of Search, which arises in its own right as one of the Council's Proposed Changes having originally been included within Area of Search 15 in the Deposit Draft Plan, involves a relatively narrow piece of open ground situated within an otherwise built-up frontage to the southern side of Rushgreen Road. There is housing in depth to the east with a primary school situated at the south-eastern corner. A small, modern, residential estate lies on the western side; the allocation land extends behind this development but there is more housing further to the west. The northern road frontage is also fully developed in this vicinity. Directly south of this site is open land which forms part of the northern section of Area of Search 15; this is described in more detail under that policy heading. One residential property stands within Area of Search 21.

3.AS21.3 The CPRE and many local residents call for the designation of this site as Green Belt. However to my mind this cannot be justified because, put simply, the allocation land does not possess the characteristic of openness and no useful purpose would be served in keeping it permanently in its present undeveloped state. This site is closely adjoined by fairly dense housing on 3 sides and, because of its configuration and relatively small size, has the appearance of vacant ground lying wholly within the built-up area. When viewing the site from any vantage point the presence of the neighbouring properties is inescapable and theirs collectively is the dominant influence on the character of this land and its immediate surroundings. If it were to be used for housing it would amount to the logical continuation of the present pattern of building development hereabouts. It would be well contained and, with the southern boundary defined by the route of a footpath, would extend no further in depth than the properties on either side of its extremities; it clearly could not be regarded as an encroachment into open countryside.

3.AS21.4 Many local Objectors claim there is a need to protect the gap between the communities of Lymm and Oughtrington. I have already set out my general views on that argument in relation to Area of Search 15 [*see paras 3.AS15.10 - 12*] and they apply equally on this occasion. In any event the gap which the allocation land represents is of minimal width and there is continuous development on the opposite side of Rushgreen Road. Neither physically nor perceptibly is there any measure of separation, in recognised planning terms, between the built-up areas on each side of this site.

3.AS21.5 For these reasons the allocation site, in my judgement, serves none of the well-acknowledged purposes of including land in Green Belts. Thus no modification should be made to the Plan in response to the foregoing objections. Nor, for similar reasons, is there merit in the arguments raised by the Oughtrington Community Association which asks that Area of Search 21 be significantly reduced in depth. Due to its nature, form and character the allocation site represents a logical single unit for planning purposes. The Local Plan should acknowledge this and should not seek to sever artificially one part from the other in the way which the Association's proposal contemplates. Contrary to the terms of this objection, I believe that the development of the whole allocated area would be much more appropriate and in keeping with the established pattern of neighbouring housing than would the "reduced" site.



3.AS21.6 Regarding the second primary issue, a major concern of local residents and organisations is that Lymm and Oughtrington would lose their character and separate identities if the allocation land were safeguarded and eventually developed. In broad terms this is a repetition of the "gap" argument identified in the first primary issue; it is also to a large extent a similar point to the one raised by Objectors to Area of Search 20 [see para 3.AS20.4]. My comments are as before [see paras 3.AS15.10 - 12].

3.AS21.7 On the matter of social infrastructure, again the present objections closely mirror those made against Area of Search 20. My conclusions on that case [see para 3.AS20.8] apply equally here.

3.AS21.8 As for traffic-related considerations, the present site has a frontage to Rushgreen Road which is one of the major routes through Lymm. The adjoining modern development is served by a conventional estate access to which, it appears, the allocation land could easily be linked. There is no technical evidence to suggest that this access would be inadequate, or that the surrounding main highway network is in any way unable, to cater for the scale of traffic which the present site potentially could generate if it were developed for housing purposes. I observe that the Council raises no such arguments against the proposal by **Peel Holdings plc** (described under the third primary issue) for the immediate development of this land.

3.AS21.9 There is one further matter which it is appropriate to address, namely agricultural land quality. **MAFF** has registered a formal objection to Area of Search 21 although it says that it does not expressly object to this allocation as such. Its position is precisely the same as in the case of Area of Search 20. In the circumstances, so is mine [see para 3.AS20.10]. Although the Rushgreen Road site comprises Grade 2 and 3a land, and is thus of the best and most versatile quality, the need for additional housing land is the overwhelming consideration here.

3.AS21.10 As to the third primary issue, which stems from the objection by **Peel Holdings plc**, I consider that on site-specific grounds alone a compelling case can be made for a positive allocation for housing development. Given the relatively small scale of this site, its well-contained nature and its intimate relationship with the neighbouring built-up area, any such scheme could easily be fully integrated so as to cause no demonstrable harm to the character and appearance of these immediate surroundings or to the settlement in general. Also I understand that there is no technical constraint to development here and, as confirmed earlier, there appear to be no social infrastructure problems either. Indeed I have already concluded that Lymm in general terms is an appropriate location for some new development [see para 3.AS14.6] largely on the basis of the scale and range of its services and facilities. The present site is within reasonably easy reach of the village centre and there are regular bus services along Rushgreen Road; it has the further advantage of directly adjoining the primary school. In these respects therefore it aligns favourably with national guidance in PPG3 on the location of new housing development. Additionally I note the Council's agreement that housing here would accord with the principles of sustainable development.

3.AS21.11 Another significant consideration concerns the last, crucial section of Policy LPS3; this imposes on all Areas of Search up to 2001 highly-restrictive provisions of the sort

which are commonly only applied to "greenfield" sites in rural areas. Given the characteristics of this particular Area of Search, it cannot realistically be categorised in that way and thus the imposition of such policy controls would be wholly unreasonable and unjustified.

3.AS21.12 The housing land supply position regarding the remainder of the current Plan period, reinforces my conclusions about the acceptability of this site for immediate release. From the analysis under Policy LPS2 it is clear to me that there is an urgent need to make further provision for housing within this Plan period in order to meet strategic requirements up to 2001 and to ensure the maintenance of a 5 years' land supply covering the short term beyond.

3.AS21.13 In all the circumstances I am convinced that it is both appropriate and necessary to allocate this Area of Search for development at the present time and I shall not therefore be endorsing either the Deposit Draft Plan or the Council's Proposed Changes (part of LPS3-a and b). Moreover, in forming this opinion I have not judged this site in isolation. In order to deal with this issue fully and equitably I have taken into account the respective merits of the other Areas of Search. However apart from nos 1, 8 and 16 which I am similarly recommending for immediate allocation none measures up to the Rushgreen Road site.

3.AS21.14 For the avoidance of any doubt I would confirm that the Objector's argument that in Lymm there is a particular need for extra housing has not influenced my foregoing conclusions. A similar point has been raised in relation to Area of Search 14; my comments on that case [see para 3.AS14.12] apply equally here.

3.AS21.15 There is no dispute between Peel Holdings and the Council that the site could accommodate some 100 dwellings; although, consistent with my conclusions about notional housing densities [see paras 3.3.32 + 33], I would encourage the parties to examine at a later stage of the planning process the scope for improving on this level of provision, in view of this agreement I see no reason to recommend formally at this time any higher capacity figure.

3.AS21.16 Lastly, the Objector suggests that a reference should be made in the Local Plan to the need for a S106 Agreement to be completed in relation to any permission for a future development scheme, in order to secure the provision of an area of open space due south of the allocation site. This is land which forms part of the northern section of Area of Search 15 and which I have already concluded should be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes [see para 3.AS15.22]. From the evidence before me the provision of open space here does not appear to be an essential pre-requisite to the development of the Rushgreen Road site for housing and this matter can best be left for the parties to discuss at a later stage of the planning process at which time the Council would be able to give full and proper consideration to the merits of the Objector's proposition in relation to the Area of Search allocation (assuming my recommendation in that regard is adopted).

## RECOMMENDATION

### 3.AS21.17 That:

- (i) the Plan be modified by the deletion from Policy LPS3 of that part of Area of Search 15 lying to the south of Rushgreen Road, Oughtrington (identified as Area of Search 21 in the Proposed Changes document) and by the inclusion of this site instead as a development allocation under the provisions of Policy LPS2 with a specified capacity of 100 housing units;
- (ii) the Proposals Map be modified accordingly;
- (iii) no modification be made to the Plan in response to objection 5875 (Peel Holdings plc) insofar as this proposes the inclusion of a reference to the need for a S106 Agreement regarding open space provision in relation to the recommended allocation in (i) above.

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### Area of Search 22 - Land north of Taylor Business Park, Culcheth

OBJECTIONS - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (pages 54 - 60)

#### Primary Issues

- 3.AS22.1 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site and its surroundings, and given the employment land supply position, should it be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.

#### Inspector's Conclusions

3.AS22.2 This site comprises a long and relatively narrow stretch of land situated between the built-up area of Culcheth to the north and the Taylor Business Park. It is primarily open but includes in the south-eastern corner a farmhouse and buildings complex. The edge of the existing settlement is defined by a former railway line which is now used as a recreational pedestrian and cycle way, the Culcheth Linear Park (CLP). There is mainly open countryside to the west of the allocation site, beyond Warrington Road, and also to the east. The business park covers a sizeable area and appears to be almost fully developed; it consists of a range of industrial buildings used for various employment purposes. There is open farmland on its southern side. A small area of land between the business park and the main road is the subject of a Local Plan proposal for employment allocation under Policy LPS2.

3.AS22.3 In the Deposit Draft Plan the present site is shown as part of the Green Belt. Taylor Estates, together with several firms based at the business park and a number of other individual Objectors, sought the exclusion of this (and adjoining) land from the designated area; some called for its allocation for future development purposes. In response the Council, as part of its Proposed Changes (part of LPS3-a and b, and LPS5-d), allocated this site as an Area of Search. This has led to a substantial amount of counter-objection from the CPRE, the Culcheth and Glazebury Action Group and many individual local residents.

3.AS22.4 On site-specific grounds there is a good case for adopting the Council's changed proposal. This piece of land, despite its generally open nature, does not have the appearance of being part of the wider area of countryside hereabouts. It is hemmed in on 2 sides by the extensive built-up edge of the settlement and by the business park premises; these have a dominating influence on the character of this site. The trees and main road bordering the short western boundary and the group of buildings at the other end give further emphasis to the sense of separation which there is between the allocation land and the surrounding area of what I would regard as genuine open countryside.

3.AS22.5 For these reasons there is no evident need for this site to be kept permanently open. If it were safeguarded and eventually brought forward for development it would amount to a consolidation of established built-up areas linking the business park to the settlement in a logical and appropriate manner without causing any material damage to the character or appearance of Culcheth or its surroundings. Certainly it would not, contrary to the views of the Action Group and other Counter-Objectors, be seen as an unrestricted sprawl of development into open countryside since the business park establishes a formidable barrier to any encroachment into the sensitive area of farmland to the south which the Council, rightly in my opinion, designates as Green Belt. And as for the need to protect the gap between Culcheth and Warrington, the contribution of the allocation site towards this acknowledged Green Belt function is negligible. In my judgement it is the edge of the business park which at this point represents, to all intents and purposes, the extremity of the gap between these 2 settlements; on this understanding there would be no conceivable risk of coalescence as a result of the Council's latest proposed allocation. Given all the foregoing considerations I am satisfied that the present site would serve no significant Green Belt purpose; my comments on the other 2 related Plan proposals for land at and adjoining the Taylor Business Park [see paras 3.2.12 - 21 and 3.5.99 - 103] reinforce this conclusion.

3.AS22.6 In regard to this case the Action Group originally raised a matter concerning the need to establish exceptional circumstances. This is the same point as was made in relation to the allocation for employment purposes of land to the west of the business park; my comments there [see para 3.2.16] apply equally on this occasion.

3.AS22.7 As for the suitability of the site as an Area of Search, the Council confirms that this is expected to serve as part of the longer-term reserve for possible employment development, as opposed to housing. This is understandable given the direct relationship of the allocation land with the established business park. I accept the Action Group's point that this would represent a doubling in size of the existing park yet, contrary to their fears, no environmental harm should necessarily arise. Given the extent of Culcheth overall, this would be only a modest-scale enlargement of the built-up settlement and, as I have already

explained, the character and appearance of these surroundings would remain essentially unaffected.

3.AS22.8 Nor is there compelling evidence that neighbouring residents' amenities would noticeably worsen or that social and technical infrastructure problems would arise if this site were eventually brought forward for development. There is housing directly beyond the CLP but there is no reason why any future scheme could not be designed with care and sensitivity to ensure it remains compatible with its residential neighbours; certain Local Plan policies have this very aim. Other matters raised by the **Action Group** and **local residents** concern the effect on services and facilities in Culcheth. However the village centre, which is within easy reach of the present site including on foot or by cycle, contains a fairly wide range of shops and business services which would seem to be well able to meet the potential demands which additional firms and employees might create. And as for the suggested problems of traffic and parking congestion, my conclusions on this same argument in relation to the proposed employment allocation of land to the west of the business park [see para 3.2.17] again apply in the present case.

3.AS22.9 The **Action Group** and other **individuals** also claim that there is no local need (meaning specific to Culcheth) for extra employment provision on the scale contemplated by reason of this allocation. A similar point arose in regard to the case identified in the preceding paragraph; once more my conclusions [see para 3.2.19] remain essentially the same although on this occasion the Borough-wide benefit is related to the longer-term (post-2001) employment land supply position described earlier under Policy LPS3.

3.AS22.10 In all the foregoing circumstances the Council's proposal now to safeguard this area of land merits support. However given my earlier conclusions [see para 3.2.21] relating to the necessary adjustment of the boundary of the employment allocation west of the business park, the Area of Search as defined in the Proposed Changes document should be slightly enlarged to incorporate the copse on the western side of this site.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

3.AS22.11 That the Plan be modified by the exclusion of land north of Taylor Business Park, Culcheth from the Green Belt and by its allocation instead as Area of Search 22 in accordance with Proposed Changes LPS3-a (part), LPS3-b (part) and LPS5-d but further modified by the inclusion within the Area of Search of the copse area which currently comprises the northern section of the adjoining proposed employment allocation site.

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**Areas of Search 23 and 24 - Bridgewater East (North) and Bridgewater East (South)**

**OBJECTIONS** - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (page 61)

**Primary Issues**

- 3.AS23/4.1 ● Given the nature and characteristics of these sites and their surroundings, should they be designated as part of the Green Belt.
- Are there reasons, based on environmental, social infrastructure, traffic safety/transportation and ecological grounds, why this land should not be safeguarded for possible longer-term development purposes.
  - Does the acknowledged need to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land outweigh the justification for allocating these sites as Areas of Search.
  - Having regard to the location and characteristics of these sites and given the development land supply position, can their allocation for development purposes prior to 2001 be justified.

**Inspector's Conclusions**

3.AS23/4.2 In the Deposit Draft Plan these sites make up the area of land which is the sole subject of the declared development strategy as described in Policy LPS1; and in tandem with those provisions it is allocated under Policy LPS6 for major, mixed-use development purposes. Arising from the Council's decision to alter the whole basis of the Plan's strategy and to delete those policies these 2 sites are now allocated under the terms of the Proposed Changes document as Areas of Search (part of LPS3-a and b).

3.AS23/4.3 In many respects the majority of objections now raised against the Area of Search allocations duplicate those submitted in relation to the Deposit Draft version of Policy LPS1. I have dealt with that policy earlier in this report and in the circumstances my analysis of the background to the Bridgewater East area and my conclusions on the primary issues concerning the Plan's original strategy serve to set the scene for my consideration of the present proposals.

3.AS23/4.4 As to the first primary issue, the northern site is substantial in size and forms part of the extensive stretch of generally open countryside which lies to the east of the intensively developed area of Bridgewater. It consists mostly of farmland although there are significant wooded areas and, scattered throughout the site, a number of farmsteads and dwellings. To the north is a broad band of farmland and then playing fields; the built-up area of Grappenhall is further on. A short distance to the south-east is the small village of Appleton Thorn. Open fields separate these 2 Areas of Search. The south site is much

smaller but generally has the same characteristics as the area to the north. Land on its western side is currently being developed, while to its south is open countryside.

**3.AS23/4.5** The CPRE, Appleton Parish Council and several local residents and organisations call for these sites to be designated as Green Belt; I am also mindful that many others who objected to the Deposit Draft Plan proposals said the same. The 2 sites are both, due to their scale and nature, open in character and appearance. As things stand, together with land to the east and south they clearly serve the purpose of preventing the outward sprawl of the built-up Bridgewater area into open countryside and they help maintain the gap between the urban edge and Appleton Thorn. On that basis there is some merit in the Counter-Objectors' argument.

**3.AS23/4.6** However there are other important considerations which support the Council's preferred approach. From many vantage points, both within and outside the allocation sites, this land is seen against the background of the extensive development to the west; and even housing at Appleton Thorn, albeit on a much lesser scale overall, is clearly evident within the general landscape. This has a noticeable impact on the environmental quality of these immediate surroundings and is a constraint on the openness of the present sites.

**3.AS23/4.7** Moreover the development approved under Section 7(1) of the 1981 New Towns Act, which I understand is shortly to be commenced, will inevitably have an appreciable effect on this locality. This comprises over 800 dwellings in total on 2 sites and is associated with the provision of major highways infrastructure part of which, the Howshoots Link Road, crosses Area of Search 23. In this connection it is significant that one of the approved developments has the effect of linking the 2 Areas of Search together, while the other, which in itself is completely free-standing, is situated directly east of the northern site. As a result of these 2 developments therefore, the current impression of uninterrupted open countryside east of Bridgewater and south of Grappenhall will be radically changed and the gap to Appleton Thorn will be appreciably reduced.

**3.AS23/4.8** The contribution to the longer-term development land supply which potentially the allocation sites could make is another influential factor. My views on the appropriateness of the Council's general approach regarding the need to safeguard certain sites notwithstanding their Green Belt potential are explained elsewhere in this report [see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4]. These 2 Areas hold an especially significant position within the identified reserve of such land. No 23 is by far the largest and No 24 is highly placed too being one of the few other particularly sizeable Areas. Thus they would, in terms of their potential capacity, make a substantial contribution to the Plan's total provision of safeguarded land and add welcome variety to the range of sites.

**3.AS23/4.9** This is a finely balanced case. However given the foregoing circumstances, and taking into account my conclusions on the second primary issue, I believe that the value of these sites to the reserve of possible longer-term development land outweighs their potential contribution to the proposed Green Belt hereabouts.

**3.AS23/4.10** In regard to the second issue, it is plain that the development of these sites, if this were eventually to occur, would represent a major urban expansion into these

essentially open surroundings. Nonetheless I am satisfied that this could be achieved in a manner which pays appropriate regard to the local environment. There has over the years been a considerable amount of housing and associated development in the Bridgewater area, doubtless altering substantially the face of the landscape; housebuilding and other construction work is still being carried out and, under the provisions of extant permissions, there is yet more to come. Thus there has been a long and continual process of change which still is not complete. I regard the current Plan proposals to safeguard these 2 sites as simply a further stage in Bridgewater's evolution. The more established of the modern estates now appear to have settled harmoniously into their surroundings; there is no reason to believe that, if Areas of Search 23 and 24 were released in the future, similarly successful results would not be achieved in respect of any proposals which may come forward. Indeed, the sheer scale of the land in question should provide the opportunity to plan the further expansion of this settlement in a cohesive and comprehensive manner at the same time embracing, beneficially, the somewhat isolated Section 7(1) sites.

3.AS23/4.11 I acknowledge that the present open gap between Bridgewater and Appleton Thorn would be reduced; this is a major point of concern for the Parish Council and many local residents. However the effect of the southernmost of the Section 7(1) developments would be to draw the main built-up area much closer to the village so that the gap then would be quite limited. In these circumstances, and given the minimal area of separation which there is between the eastern edge of Appleton Thorn and the very substantial trading estates further on, it is evident that this village would not in any event enjoy a particularly spacious or rural setting. For these reasons, while the development of the Bridgewater Areas of Search would worsen the situation, this would not be so environmentally harmful to Appleton Thorn as to justify deleting these proposed allocations.

3.AS23/4.12 Many Counter-Objectors claim that some of the land now in question deserves special protection in that it is of high landscape quality. This appears to be based on casual observation rather than any methodical, analytical exercise using recognised criteria. Even so I share the view that parts of the northern site in particular are very attractive. Yet unlike the open land directly to the north of this site (shown as an Area of High Landscape Value on the Proposals Map) it has no formal designation. Furthermore it is this Area of Search which is likely to be most affected, in terms of environmental change, by the impending Section 7(1) development. Several Local Plan policies have the aim of protecting and enhancing features of landscape importance, and securing the provision of new features, on development sites in general. I am confident that there would be scope within any future scheme for this site to enable proper respect to be paid to its inherent qualities and in these circumstances there is no reason why it should not continue to be safeguarded under Policy LPS3.

3.AS23/4.13 Another dimension of the Parish Council's environmental impact argument concerns the routing of the South Warrington Link Road across the designated Area of High Landscape Value. This is a tenuous point. As explained in my examination of the Policy LPS1 issues, the originally recognised need for this link stemmed from the transportation problems of a very much wider area. The requirement for its provision as now perceived by the Borough Council does not arise solely in order that it would serve these Areas of Search. Thus any potential environmental consequences of the construction of this road cannot be attributed wholly to the development of these 2 sites. In any event, if my



later recommendation regarding Policy T9 is adopted the safeguarding of land for the South Warrington Link Road will no longer be a provision of this Plan. Moreover it may transpire that the IUDP decides that only part of these Areas of Search needs to be brought forward for development post 2001 without any pre-requirement that the link be provided. Alternatively even if, under the provisions of that Plan, this road is deemed necessary there is certainly not at the present stage any evidence available as to its likely detailed alignment, its nature or its design; accordingly any assessment of its environmental impact is a matter of pure conjecture. The Council's proposed Area of Search allocations cannot therefore reasonably be criticised on these grounds.

3.AS23/4.14 As for social infrastructure considerations, it can reasonably be anticipated that any eventual development here would, because of its scale, to a large extent be self sufficient. Certain Local Plan policies are designed to achieve this. The Council's original intentions for this land were for a mixed-use development incorporating a neighbourhood centre, which would be expected to provide retail, social and community facilities, and also including employment and recreational provisions. The CNT's masterplan, submitted in support of its case for an immediate development allocation, makes provision for all those facilities along with new schools within an indicative scheme covering the 2 Areas of Search and the Section 7(1) sites. Obviously much would depend on the final composition of any development eventually proposed for the present allocation sites but at this stage there is no compelling evidence to suggest that services and facilities in the nearest centres of Stockton Heath, Latchford, Grappenhall and Appleton Thorn would be likely to suffer so much additional pressure as to cause those areas demonstrable harm in planning terms.

3.AS23/4.15 As for traffic safety and the need for new highways infrastructure, these matters are central to the consideration of the Council's original proposals for Bridgewater East under Deposit Draft Plan Policy LPS1. My conclusions on that case demonstrate that there are significant highways issues which need to be addressed before any further large-scale release of development land is made. However this does not preclude the allocation for safeguarding of the land now in question. On the evidence currently available there is no conclusive reason to believe that an acceptable and viable solution to the well-acknowledged transportation problems which South Warrington faces could not in the longer term be found thus freeing the Bridgewater Areas of Search from this particular constraint; the CNT's package of transportation measures and the Council's assessment of it (described under Policy LPS1) help support this view. As with all other such Areas, the decision on whether it is necessary and appropriate to bring these 2 sites forward will be made as part of the IUDP process; at that time, and in the light of the circumstances then prevailing, full and proper consideration can be given to the highways-related implications of the development of this land.

3.AS23/4.16 Nor on ecological grounds is there a convincing case against the Plan's changed proposals. These 2 sites have no formal nature conservation or wildlife habitat designation and there is simply no evidence that within them there are features of such interest as to justify keeping this land completely open and undeveloped. The CNT's comprehensive submissions on ecological issues reinforce this view and give me confidence that if, at the time any future scheme is under consideration, features which merited protection were found here, then appropriate measures could be taken in this regard; and

similarly, the ecological interests of adjoining land, some of which is formally designated, could also be taken properly into account. A number of the Plan's environmental protection policies have these very aims.

3.AS23/4.17 In summary on this issue, several Counter-Objectors maintain that these allocations are inconsistent with the principles of sustainable development. These are essentially the same arguments as were raised in relation to Policy LPS1. For the reasons previously explained *[see paras 3.1.31 - 36]* I conclude that in overall terms there is nothing about the allocation of these sites as Areas of Search which seriously conflicts with the well-acknowledged principles of sustainable development.

3.AS23/4.18 As to the third primary issue, agricultural land quality arguments have been raised by MAFF, the Parish Council and several local residents. A little over half of these Areas of Search comprises Grade 2 and 3a land. Therefore to this extent they are within the best and most versatile range which national guidance says should be protected from development. My general comments on this matter are reported elsewhere *[see paras 3.AS1.8 - 11]*. These are relevant to the present case. Furthermore I have already concluded that there are no sound Green Belt reasons for resisting the Council's Proposed Changes regarding these sites and my analysis of the second primary issue demonstrates that there are no other overriding objections to the allocation of this land for safeguarding. Thus the "agricultural land quality" argument stands alone on this occasion. However against this is compelling evidence of a need to identify a considerable reserve of land for possible longer-term development purposes as my conclusions on Policy LPS3 confirm. This, in the circumstances, is the overwhelming consideration here.

3.AS23/4.19 Turning to the final issue, the CNT objects to the Proposed Changes and seeks the confirmation of the Deposit Draft Plan policies and proposals in their original form. All relevant arguments have been addressed in my examination of Policy LPS1 and I remain convinced that the immediate allocation of the uncommitted land at Bridgewater East (ie Areas of Search 23 and 24) for development is not justified. The CNT's alternative suggestion for the immediate allocation of certain parts of this land, as identified in its intermediate masterplan, is for similar reasons unacceptable.

3.AS23/4.20 In all the circumstances I shall endorse the Proposed Changes although, arising from one of the Council's Further Suggested Changes (FSC40), there are certain minor modifications to the defined site areas which it appears appropriate to make. I observe that the boundaries of the Section 7(1) sites have been shown incorrectly on the Proposals Map; the Council has submitted a revised plan which it formally suggests should be substituted. Although no corresponding changes to Areas of Search 23 and 24 have been suggested, they are necessary since some of this allocated land falls within the newly-defined Section 7(1) sites. I endorse FSC40 itself later in this report *[see para 13.1.5]*.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.AS23/4.21 That the Plan be modified by the allocation of land at Bridgewater East (North and South) as Areas of Search 23 and 24 in accordance with Proposed Changes LPS3-a (part) and LPS3-b

(part) but further modified by the alteration of the allocation site areas as shown on the Proposals Map to take into account the redefinition of the adjoining Section 7(1) sites as described in Further Suggested Change FSC40.

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## POLICY LPS4 : UNIMPLEMENTED TIME-EXPIRED PLANNING PERMISSIONS

OBJECTIONS:	O/06169/LPS4/02965 O/06245/T/02976 O/06350/T/02977	Warrington Civic Society Department of Transport Department of the Environment
	<u>Conditionally Withdrawn</u> O/06249/LPS4/02977 O/07571/LPS4/03970	Department of the Environment Cllr Peter Black

### Primary Issues

- 3.4.1
- Should the policy introduce, in effect, a presumption against the renewal of permissions relating to the development of agricultural land and sites in the Green Belt and, in addition, should it include detailed provisions regarding considerations to be taken into account when permissions relating to the development of urban land are submitted for renewal.
  - Should the scope of the policy be widened to specify that all proposals for outline planning permission will be judged in the light of PPG13 guidance.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.4.2 Regarding the first primary issue, the Deposit Draft version of Policy LPS4 confirms that unimplemented, time-expired permissions will normally be renewed if, in essence, they meet the provisions of CSP and Local Plan policies. The Proposed Changes (LPS4-a) alter the emphasis of this policy by specifying simply broad considerations to be taken into account when reviewing such permissions, these being national guidance and current Development Plan policies. While the changed version satisfies 2 Objectors, the Warrington Civic Society pursues a more radical approach. It suggests the following replacement policy:-

"The Council may renew unimplemented time-expired planning permissions which contribute to and enhance the quality of the existing

urban environment by conforming to the traditional street patterns, use acceptable materials, possess roof forms appropriate to the traditional architectural patterns of Warrington and conforming to the urban texture and grain of the town, suburbs and villages. In order to achieve a higher quality of development, the Council may impose further material and other conditions as a condition of renewal. Unimplemented applications for development on agricultural land and in the Green Belt will be deemed to have expired."

3.4.3 To my mind the Objector's suggested policy is unacceptable. The inclusion of a provision aimed at resisting the renewal of permissions concerning land used agriculturally or in the Green Belt would conflict with national guidance in Circular 11/95. This confirms that usually renewals should be refused only in identified special circumstances none of which is expressed in such general terms as the **Civic Society** recommends. As for the remainder of the suggested text, this is inappropriate for a policy of this nature, the intention of which is to establish the broad basis on which the renewal of permissions will be considered, namely by reference simply to current national, strategic and local policy guidance. It is these policies, more particularly those of the Local Plan, which contain the sort of detailed provisions to which the **Civic Society** refers together, of course, with a wide range of other, equally relevant, considerations. The Proposed Changes version of Policy LPS4 satisfactorily serves the intended purpose and merits support.

3.4.4 As to the second issue, objections raised by the former **Departments of Transport and the Environment** in relation to the Plan's Transportation chapter call for the inclusion of a policy confirming that land which has not already been granted outline planning permission would be developed in accordance with PPG13. In response the Council has produced a Further Suggested Change to Policy LPS4 (FSC2) which widens its scope to cover all applications for permission, not just renewals, and refers expressly to the intention of giving particular consideration to the aim of reducing the need for travel, especially by car; PPG13 is specifically identified.

3.4.5 This additional policy text clearly meets these 2 objections. While perhaps not entirely essential, inasmuch as all relevant aspects of government guidance should automatically be given consideration before any planning permission is granted, these further changes do provide useful confirmation that as part of this Plan's overall strategy a central issue of current national planning policy, which is reflected at regional and strategic levels too, will be taken into account by the Council in all its decisions. I shall endorse these changes.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.4.6 That:

- (i) Policy LPS4 be modified by the deletion of the existing policy wording and the substitution therefor of new wording together with additional supporting text in accordance with Proposed Change LPS4-a

but further modified by the inclusion of additional policy wording and supporting text in accordance with Further Suggested Change FSC2;

(ii) no other modification to Policy LPS4 be made in response to objection 6169 (Warrington Civic Society).

## POLICY LPS5 : GREEN BELT BOUNDARIES - GENERAL POLICY PRINCIPLES

OBJECTIONS:	O/00627/LPS5/00260	Mr W Cartwright
	O/05892/LPS5/02906	British Gas plc
	O/06077/LPS5/02954	Redrow Homes (Northern) Ltd
	O/06158/LPS5/02964	Rural Development Commission
	O-PC/16413/LPS5/02964	Rural Development Commission
	O/06170/LPS5/02965	Warrington Civic Society
	O/10882/LPS5/02971	North West Water Limited
	O/06218/LPS5/02972	House Builders Federation (NW Region)
	O-PC/16378/LPS5/02972	House Builders Federation (NW Region)
	O/06250/LPS5/02977	Department of the Environment
	O/10893/LPS5/03970	Cllr Peter Black
	O-PC/16431/LPS5/03970	Cllr Peter Black
	<u>Conditionally Withdrawn</u>	
	O/05755/LPS5/02861	Burtonwood Brewery plc
	(reported under C14)	

### Primary Issues

- 3.5.1
- Does the policy conflict with the provisions of national guidance in relation to the re-use of buildings in the Green Belt and the specified life-span of the designated area.
  - Is the policy sufficiently clear in identifying those alterations which are being made to parts of the already adopted Green Belt and in explaining the exceptional circumstances in each case.
  - Should the policy make express provision for allowing public utilities development and is it unduly restrictive in relation to the potential development of residential gardens; or should greater restrictions be imposed on the specified exceptions to the presumption against development.

- In general should all Green Belt boundaries be reviewed in order to ensure that the Plan makes adequate provision for longer-term development requirements.
- Should all allocated Areas of Search be included within the Green Belt.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.2 As to the first primary issue, the **Rural Development Commission** in essence seeks alterations to the policy to bring it into line with PPG2 guidance regarding the re-use of buildings. Although the Council's Proposed Changes to both Policy LPS5 and Policy C7, which deals specifically with changes of use and conversions in the Green Belt, have improved the Deposit Draft versions considerably and answered most points raised by this Objector, for the sake of clarity and completeness I believe that further modifications are necessary.

3.5.3 The Council's intention is to confine all matters regarding changes of use and conversions to Policy C7, which covers Areas of Search as well as the Green Belt, with no reference at all to such proposals included in Policy LPS5. Yet this latter policy is expressly intended to set out the Plan's overall strategy for the Green Belt and therefore its failure to provide any element of guidance on the policy approach to particular forms of development is both inappropriate and confusing.

3.5.4 This omission can be remedied quite simply. This policy (as proposed for change) already includes a list of developments which are described as "not inappropriate" in Green Belt terms. This list should be extended to include the re-use of buildings (which PPG2 specifies is not inappropriate development in given circumstances) together with a suitable cross-reference to the provisions of Policy C7 to give the reader notice of the criteria which any such proposals would have to meet. This form of additional text would replicate other provisions within the said list on dwelling extensions and major developed sites. Minor associated modifications to the preamble to policy clause 5 will also be necessary.

3.5.5 On the matter of the life-span of the Green Belt, the Deposit Draft version of Policy LPS5 specified that the designated boundaries would be protected until at least 2021. This, as the former **DoE** and **Redrow Homes (Northern) Ltd** point out, is inconsistent with national guidance. The revised policy in the Proposed Changes document omits reference to the said date and instead includes the term from PPG2 "for as far as can be seen ahead". This change thus responds to these objections in an entirely satisfactory manner.

3.5.6 Also in relation to this matter the **Warrington Civic Society** says the policy should specify that Green Belt boundaries will be protected indefinitely. This goes beyond the limits imposed by national guidance and is both unrealistic and unjustified.

3.5.7 Regarding the second issue, the former **DoE** suggests the Plan should explain more clearly the alterations (and the justification for them) which are being proposed to those parts of the Borough's already adopted Green Belt. The Proposed Changes document includes an entirely new form of Policy LPS5 which describes in some detail the adopted

boundary alterations which are being made in this Plan. This appears to meet adequately the Objector's criticism. Fresh text is also included setting out the justification for these alterations although for ease of reference this is to be found under the 2 policy headings more directly associated with the site/area boundaries in question; I am broadly endorsing these particular changes in my recommendations on those respective policies (LPS2 and C2) although in each case, with the former DoE's comments in mind, I recommend additional text.

3.5.8 As to the third primary issue, **British Gas plc and North West Water Ltd** claim that the wording of Policy LPS5 could be prejudicial to their interests by preventing necessary public utilities development from being carried out. They ask in effect for such development in principle to be expressly included within those categories which are deemed to be appropriate in the Green Belt.

3.5.9 The revised policy which appears in the Proposed Changes document includes within the categories of development described as "not inappropriate" the provision of essential facilities for uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. I agree with the Council's interpretation that public utilities development which meets those criteria would not be precluded under the terms of Policy LPS5. However it is right and proper that the Plan should seek to exercise control over any such development which potentially would conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt in which event it would be for the promoter of the individual proposal to demonstrate very special circumstances in accordance with well-established national policy. PPG2 makes no express concession for public utilities development and there is no compelling reason why the Local Plan should do so either.

3.5.10 **Mr Cartwright** seeks the exclusion of all private gardens from Green Belt policy controls in view of their potential contribution to the continued supply of windfall housing sites. Such a radical alteration to the policy is wholly inappropriate; potentially it would have the effect of negating the widely-recognised aim of protecting the openness of the Green Belt. I recognise however that there may be limited circumstances, for example in the built-up confines of "washed over" villages, where further development might be acceptable; the Plan already makes provision for this under the terms of Policy C3.

3.5.11 The **Civic Society** adopts an altogether different stance. It proposes alterations to Policy LPS5 which impose additional restrictions on certain of the specified categories of development deemed to be "not inappropriate". As with this Objector's earlier suggestion, described under the first primary issue, these alterations go beyond the level of control which national guidance says is necessary in order to protect Green Belts. In addition some of the suggested provisions are vague and highly subjective. In the circumstances there is no justification for these alterations.

3.5.12 In respect of the fourth primary issue, the **HBF's** objection to Policy LPS5 is directly related to its arguments against Policy LPS3, essentially that the Plan makes insufficient provision for safeguarded land. Therefore it says that the boundaries of the Green Belt should be reviewed and more sites excluded thereby enabling the Plan to demonstrate how the Borough's longer-term development requirements can be met. I have already dealt with the substance of this objection in my conclusions on Policy LPS3. On the assumption

that my recommendations regarding the Areas of Search contained in the Plan (including those in the Proposed Changes) and other sites put forward by Objectors will be adopted, sufficient land has been identified to help enable adequate provision for development to be made for the period beyond 2001. Given those considerations no modification to Policy LPS5, as such, is necessary.

3.5.13 Regarding the final issue, Cllr Black maintains that, as a matter of principle, all Areas of Search should be included within the Green Belt (this is closely allied to his objection to Policy LPS3 which matter I have already dealt with under that policy heading); the Civic Society effectively says the same since it asks for the inner boundary of the designated area to be drawn tightly to the urban edge. Both Objectors appear to ignore the vital role which safeguarded land must play in terms of enabling Green Belt boundaries to endure while facilitating in the longer-term any necessary development outside of the present built-up areas. PPG2 acknowledges the importance of such areas and advises on how they should be treated in local plans and on the sort of policies to which they should be subject. The approach taken by this Plan is consistent with that advice and, given that my analysis of Policy LPS3 clearly demonstrates there is a need for a reserve of such land in this Borough, in the circumstances the Objectors' proposal does not merit support.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.14 That:

- (i) Policy LPS5 be modified by deleting the existing policy wording and substituting new wording together with additional supporting text in accordance with Proposed Change LPS5-a but further modified by deleting the preamble of clause 5 and substituting "DEVELOPMENT INSIDE THE GREEN BELT IS INAPPROPRIATE UNLESS IT IS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW BUILDINGS FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES:" and by adding at the end after the fifth listed item:- "OR FOR THE RE-USE OF BUILDINGS (SUBJECT TO POLICY C7).";
  - (ii) no modification be made to the Plan in response to objections 627 (Mr Cartwright), 5892 (British Gas plc), 6170 (Warrington Civic Society), 10882 (North West Water Ltd); 6218 and 16378 (House Builders Federation) and 10893 and 16431 (Cllr Black).
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## **POLICY LPS5 : GREEN BELT BOUNDARIES - INDIVIDUAL SITES**

### **Appleton - Bellfield Farm**

**OBJECTION:**            O/11037/LPS5/02937                            Ashall Developments Ltd

#### **Primary Issues**

- 3.5.15            ●            Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, and given the housing land supply position, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead for housing purposes within the Plan period.

#### **Inspector's Conclusions**

3.5.16            This is a small area of open farmland which lies directly to the south of the built-up area of Appleton as shown on the Proposals Map. To the north-west is a farm complex and then a ribbon of dwellings, while on the north-eastern side is a large site which, at the time of my inspection, was being developed for housing purposes. To the west, south and south-east is mainly open countryside.

3.5.17            In my judgement the objection land forms an integral part of this countryside fringe. Due to its nature and appearance, and the absence of any significant boundary feature on the eastern side, there is little to distinguish this site from the surrounding farmland; in this respect although there is a narrow track along the south-western boundary, this does not create any noticeable physical division. On the other hand there is a clear contrast in character between the present site and the established built-up area, while the mutual boundary with the adjoining development land is well defined by a mature hedgerow and trees. And once that development is complete doubtless the distinction will be even more pronounced.

3.5.18            Given these circumstances, in my view the objection site plays a vital role particularly in terms of helping check the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area of Appleton and assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; accordingly its designation as part of the Green Belt is entirely justified. The boundary of the designated area as identified by the Plan is firm and defensible, and it should remain unchanged.

3.5.19            In reaching this conclusion I have borne in mind Ashall Developments Ltd's argument that in previous draft Plans the present site has been excluded from the Green Belt. However the boundary of the designated area is being formally defined and adopted for the first time in this Local Plan and it is appropriate and necessary to judge matters on the basis of the circumstances currently prevailing. In this regard, contrary to the Objector's claim, there is no national policy requirement to establish exceptional circumstances. The PPG2

guidance on this matter applies to altering either the general extent of an approved Green Belt or detailed boundaries in adopted local plans; neither situation arises here.

3.5.20 As for housing land supply considerations, these matters are fully examined in my assessment of the current position under Policy LPS2. While I accept the Objector's fundamental argument about there being a shortfall against strategic requirements, for the reasons explained in that assessment there is simply no need to release this site for housing purposes. The Borough's requirements can be satisfactorily met from other more acceptable sources either already identified/allocated in the Plan or recommended by me for adoption.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.21 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to this objection.

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### Appleton Thorn - Bradley Hall Farm/Cliff Lane Farm

OBJECTIONS:	O/05776/LPS5/02868	Messrs S and P Sinker
	O/05847/LPS5/02899	J K and J M Cross
	O-PC/11488/LPS5/05540	Arlington Securities plc
	O/05775/LPS3/02868	Messrs S and P Sinker
	(part reported)	
	O/05848/LPS3/02899	J K and J M Cross
	(part reported)	
	O-PC/11489/LPS3/05540	Arlington Securities plc
	(part reported)	

### Primary Issues

- 3.5.22 ● Are there exceptional circumstances, based on site-specific considerations and the longer-term employment land supply position at both the local and regional levels, which would justify the alteration of designated Green Belt boundaries and the allocation of this land instead as an Area of Search.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.23 This case concerns an extensive area of mainly open farmland situated between the northern section of the Barleycastle Trading Estate and the M6/M56 motorway interchange. This site, due to its nature, appearance and scale, plainly possesses the characteristic of openness and is a significant and integral part of the stretch of countryside

due east of Appleton Thorn village and south-east of Warrington's main urban area. Together with surrounding farmland the objection site plays a valuable Green Belt role (most of it lies within the area so designated in the adopted Stretton Airfield Local Plan) primarily in terms of helping check the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area and assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

3.5.24 If this land were eventually brought forward for development as the Objectors propose, it would represent a substantial outward spread of the built-up area into these generally open surroundings and would seriously damage the character and appearance of this area. In addition, given the absence of any noticeable boundary features on the southern side of this site, the further sprawl of development in this direction towards both the M56 and the remainder of the trading estate would be difficult to resist thereby worsening still more the environmental impact on this stretch of countryside.

3.5.25 As to the longer-term, Borough-wide employment land supply position, my analysis of this under Policy LPS3 demonstrates that in the period to 2011 the anticipated requirements can be adequately met from the already identified forward supply of employment land. And while during the following 10-year period it is likely that there would be a modest shortfall, for the reasons explained earlier [*see paras 3.3.37 + 38*] this need not be a matter for serious concern at the present time.

3.5.26 The Objectors also raise arguments about regional employment provision, in particular the need, as they see it, for a flagship site for which purpose it is claimed the objection land is ideally suited. I have already dealt with the substance of this matter under Policy LPS3. For the reasons previously explained [*see paras 3.3.42 + 43*] there is no compelling case on regional employment policy grounds for identifying this site in the manner sought by the Objectors.

3.5.27 Given all those considerations, the longer-term employment land supply position is such that there is no justification for the allocation of this site as an Area of Search. To my mind the Green Belt argument is overwhelming; there are no exceptional circumstances to warrant altering the adopted boundaries of the designated area.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

3.5.28 **That no modification be made to the Plan in response to these objections.**

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## Appleton Thorn - Oaklegh Lodge Farm

OBJECTIONS:	O/05972/LPS5/02939 (reported under Policy LPS2) O/07039/LPS5/03678 O/16710/LPS5/03678	Limewood Developments Ltd  Dr Michael Madden Dr Michael Madden
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### Primary Issues

- 3.5.29 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, and given the housing land supply position, should it be excluded from the Green Belt and allocated instead for housing purposes within the Plan period.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.30 Oaklegh Lodge Farm lies to the east of the Barleycastle Trading Estate. The site identified by **Dr Madden** comprises about half of the area which is the subject of **Limewood Developments Ltd's** objection which I have dealt with earlier [*see paras 3.2.6 - 11*].

3.5.31 **Dr Madden's** proposal is to exclude his land from the Green Belt and to allocate it for the purposes of affordable housing. In isolation there is nothing to justify the release of this site. It is separated by a strip of farmland from both the present trading estate and the Plan's employment allocation land; also, significantly, it occupies just a limited length of the currently vacant road frontage to the re-aligned Barleycastle Lane. Thus, unlike **Limewood's** proposal its development would not represent the consolidation and completion of the existing built-up area nor would it establish a well-defined boundary for Green Belt purposes.

3.5.32 Furthermore, this is an entirely inappropriate location for housing on the scale envisaged by the Objector. It would be remote from any other residential community and some distance from essential shops and services; its obvious proximity to so many potential employment opportunities does not outweigh those disbenefits. Although there is a general need for the Plan to make further provision for housing land prior to 2001, I am satisfied that, for the reasons explained under Policy LPS2, this can be achieved from other far more acceptable sources of supply.

3.5.33 In particular regard to affordable housing, the approach of the Plan is to seek the provision of such accommodation as a proportion of, implicitly, much larger schemes in urban areas in order, it seems to me, to secure a reasonable mix and balance of house types and sizes and to ensure that the development would be a viable proposition. This is consistent with the advice in PPG3 and Circular 6/98. I observe that the Plan does not include a policy of the sort referred to in national guidance for the provision of affordable housing in rural areas; in any event that guidance refers to small sites within or adjoining villages and thus is wholly unrelated to the circumstances of the present case.

3.5.34 Given those considerations, I find no merit in **Dr Madden's** arguments and shall not endorse them. However this should not be interpreted as in any way weakening the strength of the case for **Limewood's** proposal for the exclusion of all the land south and west of **Barleycastle Lane** from the Green Belt and its allocation for employment purposes.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.35 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to objections 7039 and 16710 (**Dr Madden**).

### Appleton Thorn - Thornbrow Farm

OBJECTION: O/05938/LPS5/02923 G P Rigby

#### Primary Issues

3.5.36 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and included instead within the village inset.

#### Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.37 Thornbrow Farmhouse stands at the edge of the built-up area of **Appleton Thorn** village. Immediately in front of this property is a modern dwelling which faces **Green Lane**, while directly behind is a group of 2-storey barns which at the time of my inspection were undergoing conversion into residential units. All these properties, which are included in the present objection site, lie just outside the village inset as shown on the Proposals Map and within the Green Belt. All the other nearby housing is within the inset boundary.

3.5.38 The farmhouse and the properties to its front and rear form a small, compact block of development which plainly has a built-up appearance and which enjoys a very close relationship with neighbouring housing. Its inclusion in the Green Belt is quite illogical and inappropriate because it serves none of the acknowledged purposes for which such land is so designated. I note that permission for the barns conversion was granted on the basis that they were redundant farm buildings in the (draft) Green Belt. However in physical land-use terms this whole group of properties is now, to all intents and purposes, an integral part of the village and the Local Plan should recognise this. The Council appears to be concerned that the inclusion of this section of the objection site within the village inset would lead to harmful development. However, notwithstanding that this land is already fully developed with mostly modern dwelling-units, the Council would have control over any future proposals under the

provisions of Local Plan Policy C2 which enables development inappropriate to the size and character of the village to be resisted.

3.5.39 As for the remainder of the objection site which lies to the north of the buildings group, I reach a different conclusion. This is open ground partly occupied by farm buildings. These structures are, in terms of their scale, character and appearance, noticeably different from the adjoining residential properties and because of this they have much greater affinity with the stretch of farmland to the north than with the built-up area of the village. The open parts of this section of the site and the absence of any noticeable boundary feature on this side (in fact the defined site boundary runs through the centre of one of the buildings and then follows an arbitrary line across a field) strengthen this impression.

3.5.40 In my opinion this piece of land does contribute to the openness of the area surrounding Appleton Thorn; as such it helps check the unrestricted sprawl of this settlement, assists in preventing the countryside from encroachment and plays a part in maintaining an open gap between this village and the Bridgewater urban area. In these circumstances the Plan is correct to designate this section of the objection site as Green Belt.

3.5.41 For all the foregoing reasons I intend recommending the inclusion of the "residential" part of this site within the village inset but, so far as the remainder (the yellow area as defined on the Objector's plan) is concerned, the Plan deserves to remain unaltered. The effect of this will be to enhance the credibility of the Green Belt hereabouts and provide it with a firm, defensible boundary.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.42 That:

(i) the Proposals Map be modified by the exclusion from the Green Belt of land at Thornbrow Farm, Appleton Thorn (comprising the farmhouse and the modern dwellings to its front and rear, and their respective domestic curtilages) and by its inclusion instead within the village inset;

(ii) no modification be made to the Plan in respect of the land to the north of Thornbrow Farm, Appleton Thorn (shown edged in yellow on the plan attached to Document 2923b accompanying this objection).

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**Burtonwood - Yew Tree Farm**

OBJECTION:            O/05754/LPS5/02861                            Burtonwood Brewery plc

**Primary Issues**

- 3.5.43            ●            Given the location, characteristics and use of this site, should it be included within the area of the Burtonwood Brewery major developed site.

**Inspector's Conclusions**

3.5.44            The objection site comprises a small cluster of farm buildings, including a dwelling, together with a yard and an open exercise area for horses; it is situated on the eastern side of Bold Lane. On the opposite side of this road is Burtonwood Brewery. These are extensive premises consisting of a range of old and modern structures with a considerable amount of open storage areas. The wider surroundings are predominantly open in character.

3.5.45            In the Deposit Draft Plan both Yew Tree Farm and the brewery are shown on the Proposals Map as being part of the Green Belt. However at the Proposed Changes stage the Council introduced a new policy (C14) identifying major developed sites in the Green Belt. Burtonwood Brewery is named as one such site, the defined boundaries of which enclose the operational land west of Bold Lane; the original designation in respect of Yew Tree Farm remains unchanged.

3.5.46            The essence of the Objector's case is that the farm property should be included within the Policy C14 site because of the relationship between them and, more particularly, in order to provide space on to which the brewery could in the future expand without the constraints imposed by normal Green Belt policy provisions.

3.5.47            From the evidence available however, there seems to be little of significance in planning terms to connect these 2 sites. Yew Tree Farm is a typical small yard/buildings complex; it is agricultural in appearance and character and is surrounded by farmland on 3 sides. It is separated from the brewery premises by the main road. I am told that one of the buildings within this yard has been used recently for storage purposes by the brewery company but this is without the benefit of planning permission; therefore whether this is a lawful use is still open to question. To my mind this alleged functional relationship is based on such fragile grounds that, in the absence of any other persuasive land-use considerations, it should not seriously influence decisions on the designation of land in the Local Plan. Nor, in the circumstances, is the fact that the brewery company has owned the farm site since about 1993 a compelling consideration.

3.5.48            Policy C14 stems from the guidance in PPG2. This refers explicitly to "major existing developed sites" (para 3.4) and, for the purposes of site boundary definition, the "present extent of development" (Annex C3). On the basis of the foregoing considerations

I would not regard Yew Tree Farm as being part of the existing developed brewery site, the operational area of which is clearly evident on the ground. For this reason there is no justification for extending the Policy C14 boundaries beyond the area shown in the Proposed Changes document. The farm site is, by reason of its nature, characteristics and close relationship with surrounding farmland, clearly an integral part of the open countryside around Burtonwood village; as such it performs acknowledged Green Belt functions and should be subject to the general policy controls which Policy LPS5 provides. Accordingly, the Local Plan designation is entirely right in this instance.

3.5.49 In reaching this conclusion I have taken into account the Objector's arguments about the brewery's current operational problems and its need for extra space. Plainly this business has been an important source of local employment over a considerable period of time; it has expanded and improved substantially, especially so in recent years. There is strong evidence that more accommodation, particularly for administrative purposes, is required. The Council accepts that it would be undesirable, in local economic terms, if this extra provision had to be located outside Warrington Borough. Naturally it would be convenient for the brewery company if it were able to make use of Yew Tree Farm for its business activities; but having this property designated as part of the major developed site is not the only conceivable solution. It is open to the Objector to submit a planning application for such development as it wishes. If this were to comprise the re-use of existing buildings then Local Plan Policy C7 generally favours such proposals subject to certain safeguards. Alternatively, very special circumstances could be pleaded, doubtless involving the sort of detailed arguments now put forward by the Objector; in this regard I am conscious that the Council has been prepared to grant the brewery planning permissions on a number of occasions in the recent past notwithstanding the Green Belt notation which has applied to the established premises.

3.5.50 In all the circumstances, regarding Yew Tree Farm there is no reason to modify the Plan. I deal with other matters raised by this Objector in relation to Policy C14 and the established brewery site later in this report under that policy heading,

## **RECOMMENDATION**

3.5.51 **That no modification be made to the Plan in response to this objection.**

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**Burtonwood - Land south of Alder Lane**

OBJECTION:            O/05940/LPS5/02925                            James Fairclough & Sons

**Primary Issues**

- 3.5.52            ●            Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead as an Area of Search.

**Inspector's Conclusions**

3.5.53            The objection land comprises open fields on the eastern side of the village. There is a small recreation ground to the north-west but otherwise this site is surrounded by farmland. The built-up area of the village lies beyond the recreation ground and its eastern limits are well defined by Fir Tree Lane.

3.5.54            Due to its scale and nature, the objection land clearly forms an integral part of the extensive area of open countryside around Burtonwood. If it were to be safeguarded, as the Objector proposes, and eventually brought forward for development this would amount to the outward spread of the village into these essentially rural surroundings thereby causing serious harm to the character and appearance of this area. It is therefore important that this land be kept permanently open; it has a vital role to play as part of the Green Belt hereabouts and for these reasons the Plan should remain unaltered.

**RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.5.55            **That no modification be made to the Plan in response to this objection.**

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**Burtonwood - Land fronting Fir Tree Lane**

OBJECTION:            O/05942/LPS5/02927                            Mr J Fairclough

**Primary Issues**

- 3.5.56            ●            Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead as an Area of Search.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.57 The objection site has a long frontage to the eastern side of Fir Tree Lane. The northernmost section consists of a farmhouse and barns complex; the rest comprises the front section of an extensive open field. There is farmland to the north and east of this site. A nursing home adjoins the southern boundary but there is open ground beyond. The built-up area of Burtonwood lies to the west of the main road.

3.5.58 The objection land, due to its size, configuration and predominantly open nature, is clearly part of the extensive stretch of countryside which surrounds this village. The edge of the built-up area, enclosed as it is by Fir Tree Lane, is quite distinct on the ground and is accurately depicted on the Proposals Map. If, as the Objector recommends, this site were safeguarded and in the longer term developed for housing, this would represent the unrestricted sprawl of the built-up area into these essentially rural surroundings and would cause significant harm to the appearance and character of this locality. Moreover, the absence of any physical feature along most of the eastern boundary of the objection site would make it difficult to resist the further outward spread of the village thereby damaging the countryside fringe still more. This site performs the important Green Belt function of helping prevent such encroachment and it should remain within the area so designated in this Plan.

### RECOMMENDATION

3.5.59 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to this objection.

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### Collins Green - Land north of Pennington Lane

OBJECTION: O/05939/LPS5/02924 Mr J Morris

#### Primary Issues

- 3.5.60 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead as an Area of Search.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.61 This case concerns an area of overgrown scrubland which lies some distance to the north of the small hamlet of Collins Green. This site is surrounded by open land

although a short way to the north-east is housing and other development on the outskirts of Newton-le-Willows. Given the nature and location of the objection land it plainly is an integral part of the stretch of open countryside which separates the towns of Newton-le-Willows and St Helens. As such it serves the vital purposes of helping prevent those settlements from merging and assisting in checking the spread of urban development towards Collins Green which the Local Plan designates as a "washed-over" village within the Green Belt.

3.5.62 If this site were safeguarded and eventually brought forward for housing as the Objector intends, this would amount to a relatively isolated block of development in the countryside which would cause appreciable harm to the character and general appearance of these surroundings. I understand that there was once a cottage on this land and that around the time of its demolition many years ago a replacement dwelling was contemplated. Even if such a proposal were in prospect, and it is not for me to comment on the merits of that, this would not change the present circumstances materially in terms of whether or not this land is a suitable candidate for Area of Search status.

3.5.63 The Plan's approach, rightly in my opinion, has been to allocate for safeguarding only land on the edges of settlements; this is consistent with the guidance in PPG2. Mr Morris' proposition is a complete departure from that procedure and is, in all the circumstances, wholly inappropriate. The case for the inclusion of this site in the Green Belt is compelling.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

3.5.64 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to this objection.

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### **Collins Green - Toll Bar House**

OBJECTION: O/05941/LPS5/02926 Mr J Garry

#### **Primary Issues**

- 3.5.65 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead as an Area of Search.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.66 The objection property occupies a long, narrow site beside the main road leading into the small hamlet of Collins Green. It is surrounded primarily by open farmland and this entire area is distinctly rural in character. The objection land lies only a short distance from the Pennington Lane site the subject of the preceding case. My conclusions there [see paras 3.5.61 + 62], insofar as they relate to the role of this area of countryside as part of the Green Belt and the likely harm which future development would cause, apply equally to the present case. And again, this proposal is completely at odds with the Plan's fully justified approach of only safeguarding land which lies on the edges of settlements.

3.5.67 In any event it appears from the evidence that the purpose behind this objection is to enable Mr Garry to provide just 2 dwellings on this site for himself and a relative as soon as possible. This is something which can be pursued through the normal development control process. An Area of Search allocation is intended to address much more broadly-based housing provision issues in the longer term.

3.5.68 Given the foregoing considerations, I conclude that it is right to include this site in the Green Belt; the Plan should remain unchanged.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.69 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to this objection.

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## Croft - Land at Lady Lane

OBJECTIONS:	O/05852/LPS5/02900	Peel Holdings plc
	O/05855/LPS3/02900	Peel Holdings plc
	(part reported)	

## Primary Issues

- 3.5.70 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, and given the longer-term housing land supply position, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead as an Area of Search.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.71 This site comprises a large open field which lies just beyond the built-up limits of Croft village. To the south of the objection land is Area of Search 10, while to the west is Area of Search 9; details of these Areas are set out earlier in this report under their respective policy headings. Open farmland adjoins the present site on its northern side, while to the east, beyond Lady Lane, is a church and then an extensive area of countryside.

3.5.72 This piece of land is, due to its scale and nature, clearly open in character. To that extent it compares favourably with the adjoining Areas of Search. However in other respects there are significant differences. The present site does not have the same characteristic of containment. On its northern boundary there is only a sparse hedgerow and a few trees. In visual terms it is therefore much better related to the neighbouring farmland than to the built-up area; the well-defined mutual boundaries with Areas of Search 9 and 10 serve to emphasise the impression of separation from the village.

3.5.73 Given those considerations, to my mind this site has the appearance of being part of the broad stretch of open countryside around Croft. As such it helps contain any unrestricted outward sprawl of development thereby protecting these open surroundings and it contributes usefully to the gap which separates this settlement from Culcheth to the north-east; these are important Green Belt functions which the Local Plan rightly recognises. Furthermore the Objector's proposal for the safeguarding of this land would mean the adoption of a Green Belt boundary which would be fragile in nature and, consequently, difficult to defend in the future. This would be contrary to national guidance. By contrast, as I have previously stated [*see paras 3.AS9.4 and 3.AS10.3*], the boundaries of the designated area as shown in the Plan are firm and defensible; they should remain unaltered.

3.5.74 A major argument raised by the Objector concerns the longer-term housing land supply position. Basically it is claimed that safeguarding the present site is necessary both to help meet an anticipated shortfall against estimated strategic requirements and to provide additional flexibility in the identified supply. I have considered this entire matter under Policy LPS3. From my assessment there it is evident that further land must be allocated in this Plan for possible longer-term development purposes. Yet I am convinced that the need to do so is not so great as to require the release of the objection land. Sufficient additional provision can be made from other far more acceptable sources which I am recommending for adoption as further Areas of Search in order to ensure that in quantitative terms an adequate reserve of such land is available for consideration under the IUDP procedures; furthermore this would represent a wide enough range of sites, in terms of both size and distribution, to make certain that the flexibility in supply, which the Council quite properly is anxious to secure, is provided.

3.5.75 In reaching those conclusions I have taken into account the Objector's point regarding the limitations on the potential development capacity of Area of Search 9 which arise from its partial designation as a Site of Biological Importance. Nature conservation considerations may well constrain the scale of housebuilding on that site but there is no compelling evidence to suggest that this needs to be redressed by making yet more provision elsewhere in Croft. This is something which should be capable of resolution as part of the IUDP's examination of the Borough-wide, post-2001 housing land supply position. There

is sufficient potential capacity within the total reserve of safeguarded land identified in this Plan (assuming my recommendations are accepted) to ensure that precisely this sort of issue can be dealt with at the appropriate time.

3.5.76 The Objector also claims that there are other benefits to be gained from safeguarding this piece of land but I am unconvinced of their real value. I accept that development here would provide the opportunity to establish, direct on to Lady Lane, an access which could serve in addition Areas of Search 9 and 10; yet as things currently stand there is no overwhelming technical or environmental objection to those sites on traffic-related grounds as my examination of those cases demonstrates [*see paras 3.AS9.18 - 20 and 3.AS10.5*]. Also, while extra housing in Croft would no doubt help improve the future prospects of the current range of village shops and services, there is no evidence that their continued existence actually depends on the development of the objection site, especially given that any future housing on Areas of Search 9 and 10 would conceivably have a similarly beneficial impact. And the suggested benefits of creating a closer physical link between the village and the church would, to a degree, be likely to arise in any event if those Areas are brought forward for development.

3.5.77 In summary, I acknowledge that the objection site shares many of the attributes, including those relating to the principles of sustainable development, of Areas of Search 9 and 10. However in one significant respect, its value as Green Belt land, it is different. This is the overriding consideration.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.78 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to these objections.

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### Culcheth - Land to the north and east of Culcheth

OBJECTIONS:	O/05803/LPS5/02881	Mr & Mrs P Twist
	O/05851/LPS5/02900	Peel Holdings plc
	O/05960/LPS5/02933	R & C Love Ltd
	O/05802/LPS3/02881	Mr & Mrs P Twist
	(part reported)	
	O/05855/LPS3/02900	Peel Holdings plc
	(part reported)	
	O/11024/LPS3/02933	R & C Love Ltd
	(part reported)	

## Primary Issues

- 3.5.79
- Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, and given the longer-term development land supply position, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead as an Area of Search.
  - Is there a need for a Culcheth by-pass which would justify the longer-term development of this site in order to secure the associated provision of such a road.
  - Having regard to the same considerations as in the first primary issue, can the allocation of part only of this site as an Area of Search be justified.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.80 As to the first issue, **Peel Holdings plc** seeks the allocation for safeguarding of some 76 ha of land which extends around almost the entire eastern side of Culcheth, and substantially to its north as well. This site is mostly open farmland although in the northern sector there is one significant area of trees, Wellfield Wood. The adjoining edge of the settlement comprises for the most part housing and playing fields, while the outer boundary of the objection land is defined by the alignment of a by-pass which **Peel** includes in its proposals.

3.5.81 This land, by reason of its scale, nature and appearance, is unquestionably an integral part of the stretch of open countryside which surrounds Culcheth; the absence of any existing physical features along the outer site boundary further emphasises this impression. In these circumstances it is well capable of serving Green Belt purposes particularly in terms of helping check the unrestricted sprawl of the settlement, assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and contributing to the open gap separating Culcheth and Glazebury.

3.5.82 If all the objection land were safeguarded, and eventually brought forward for development, this would represent a major expansion of the village, radically changing its present rural setting and causing serious damage to the appearance and character of this attractive area of open countryside. It would also appreciably reduce the extent of separation which there is between Culcheth and Glazebury.

3.5.83 These are powerful arguments in support of the Plan's designation of this land as Green Belt. However **Peel** maintains that in order to remedy a shortfall in the longer-term development land provision, and to provide flexibility in that supply, the allocation of this site for such purposes is necessary. I disagree. From my assessment under Policy LPS3 of the post-2001 housing and employment land supply position it is clear that there is an urgent requirement for more sites to be safeguarded under the terms of this Plan. However I am satisfied that adequate additional provision can be made from other far more acceptable sources (recommended elsewhere in this report for allocation as further Areas of Search)

without the need to call on the present site in its entirety. Not only would this overall reserve of land be sufficient in quantitative terms, but also it would provide an appropriate measure of flexibility in the range of sites identified.

3.5.84 Certain other points raised by the Objector do have some foundation however. This site would be large enough to accommodate a mixed-use development including a wide range of house types. It is within easy reach, on foot or by cycle, of the village centre which has a good representation of typical shops and services; schools too are fairly close by. There appear to be a number of local employment opportunities, notably the Taylor Business Park, and the major employment areas of north-east Warrington are not too distant. I am told that several bus routes through the village, and connecting with surrounding towns, are convenient for this site. In these respects therefore Peel's proposal scores quite well in terms of PPG13 guidance.

3.5.85 Also, the Objector has produced a preliminary scheme which is aimed at creating a well-treed setting for the extended settlement, including the provision of a country park beyond the line of the suggested by-pass, and establishing a network of recreational footpaths and cycleways. These, plainly, would be beneficial proposals. And this, together with the transportation implications arising from the points identified in the preceding paragraph, helps illustrate some of the ways in which this suggested scheme would accord with the principles of sustainable development. Furthermore, in the same context I acknowledge, as the Objector points out, that no overwhelming "agricultural land quality" issue arises in this case; nor are there any landscape or nature conservation designations applicable to this site.

3.5.86 Yet to my mind those considerations are far outweighed by the arguments for protecting this area of land as open countryside in its own right. For this reason, and given my conclusions on the second primary issue, there is no compelling basis for modifying the Plan (save in respect of Mr and Mrs Twist's site, as explained in the third issue).

3.5.87 As to the second issue, the main plank of Peel's case concerns the need for a by-pass around the eastern side of Culcheth. I deal with this matter in detail later under the Transportation policies heading. My conclusions there [see paras 12.16.12 - 22] are that no justification exists for the safeguarding within this Plan of a route for a Culcheth by-pass; thus the Objector's arguments that such a road would only materialise with the benefit of substantial private funds generated by the eventual development of this site, that it would establish both a new definitive edge to the built-up settlement and a firm, defensible Green Belt boundary and that it would enable the development itself to be satisfactorily served (there being no dispute in this regard about the inadequacies of the existing road system through Culcheth) are not persuasive. It therefore follows that there is no case on highways/transportation grounds for allocating the objection land as an Area of Search.

3.5.88 A further consequence of my conclusions about the road proposal is that the second limb of Peel's transportation "package", namely the provision of a railway station together with a park and ride facility at the northern tip of the present site, also fails; this is reported more fully under the Policy T4 heading. Again, contrary to the Objector's belief, no benefit arises which would justify an Area of Search allocation here.



3.5.89 Turning to the third issue, the site the subject of **R & C Love Ltd's** objection is an area of about 20 ha which forms the southernmost section of the **Peel** proposal. The case made by this Objector is in essence the same as that outlined above. The eastern site boundary is defined by the alignment of **Peel's** proposed by-pass. Since no fresh considerations arise in this particular case, I reach the same conclusions as before. No modification should be made to the Plan.

3.5.90 However I take a different view about **Mr and Mrs Twist's** proposal. The land which they promote comprises much of the northern sector of the **Peel** site and extends to some 24 ha. Of significance is the fact that this area of land, although comprising mainly open fields, is fairly well contained around most boundaries. In this respect all the defined site boundaries follow existing physical features and no reference is made to the alignment of **Peel's** proposed by-pass. To the west and south is the substantially built-up edge of the village and this has a noticeable urbanising influence on the character of these immediate surroundings. Along the entire eastern side is **Wellfield Wood**, a broad belt of mature trees which represents a conspicuous landscape feature. The shorter northern boundary is not so well defined, following as it does the line of the narrow **Jibcroft Brook**, although it is worthy of note that this waterway extends westwards and marks the established village limits. Perhaps more importantly however, only a short distance north of the brook is the **Liverpool-Manchester** railway line; this is carried on a substantial embankment which creates a visual and physical barrier thereby effectively divorcing this objection site from the open land further to the north.

3.5.91 In these circumstances I consider that this piece of land, despite its scale and nature, does not enjoy a particularly close relationship with the area of genuinely open countryside which surrounds **Culcheth**; as such its potential value to the **Green Belt** is quite limited.

3.5.92 On the other hand the contribution which the objection land could make as an **Area of Search** is considerable. My views on the Plan's general approach regarding the need to safeguard certain sites notwithstanding their **Green Belt** potential are explained elsewhere in this report [see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4]. These are relevant to this case. The objection site is larger than most of the **Areas of Search** allocated in the Plan; therefore in terms of its potential capacity it could, subject to the highway infrastructure considerations which I explain shortly, represent a significant additional source of supply for longer-term development purposes. And, beneficially, it would provide further variety to the range of sizes and general distribution of such sites.

3.5.93 If **Mr and Mrs Twist's** site were safeguarded, and in the longer term brought forward for development, any proposal should be capable of being well integrated with neighbouring housing and would be in scale and character with the existing settlement. Moreover it would cause no appreciable environmental harm since encroachment into the truly rural countryside east of **Wellfield Wood** and north of the railway would not arise. Nor would the open gap between **Culcheth** and **Glazebury** be measurably reduced; the adjoining housing just south of this site already extends further east towards **Glazebury**.

3.5.94 Other general guidance in **PPG2** (Annex B) about identifying land for safeguarding is also met. Development here would result in an attractive, well landscaped

urban edge in as much as it would benefit from the extensive border formed by Wellfield Wood. This site lies within easy reach, including by cyclists and pedestrians, of the village centre whose range of shops and services I have already remarked on; and, as with the Peel land, employment opportunities and public transport facilities are available. Furthermore there is no evidence before me of any significant nature conservation, landscape quality or agricultural land issues in relation to this case. For these reasons this proposal aligns favourably with the principles of sustainable development.

3.5.95 However there is one infrastructure argument identified by the Council which casts doubt on the genuine availability of the present site whenever it may be needed. It is claimed that there is no satisfactory means of access to the objection land and that in any event the surrounding road network is incapable of serving any further development. Yet the technical evidence on which the Council relies for this assertion relates to Peel's larger-scale proposal and there is no detailed information expressly rebutting Mr and Mrs Twist's contention that adequate access arrangements can be achieved for a development of the size which they contemplate here. Nonetheless it is clear from my own observations, and from evidence submitted by others in relation to objections concerning other Culcheth proposals, that this village suffers fairly widespread traffic-related problems. In the circumstances, it is conceivable that the potential capacity of the present site could be restricted by reason of access difficulties, or perhaps the commencement of building work might simply be delayed to await general highway improvements in the locality. However there is no compelling evidence that development would necessarily be ruled out altogether; in all probability some housing provision could be made here and therefore it is entirely reasonable to safeguard this land for that eventuality. This is the same approach as the Council itself has taken in the case of Area of Search 11 where a similar situation arises. Also I am mindful that, as with every Area of Search, highway safety/capacity considerations would be examined in detail as part of the IUDP process when a decision about whether this site is needed for development is expected to be made.

3.5.96 In summary, I am convinced that Mr and Mrs Twist's site, in isolation, would serve no significant useful purpose as part of the proposed Green Belt surrounding Culcheth and that, given the clear need for this Plan to identify further land for safeguarding and this site's undoubted suitability for such purposes, it should be allocated as an Area of Search.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.97 That:

(i) the Plan be modified by the exclusion of land to the north of Culcheth (identified on the plan at Appendix MCP1 in Document 2881a accompanying objections 5802 and 5803 - Mr and Mrs Twist) from the Green Belt and its allocation instead as an Area of Search under the provisions of Policy LPS3;

(ii) no modification be made to the Plan in response to objections 5851 and 5855 (Peel Holdings plc) and 5960 and 11024 (R & C Love Ltd).

**Culcheth - Land at the Taylor Business Park**

OBJECTIONS - List of objections attached at Appendix 1 (page 62)

**Primary Issues**

- 3.5.98       ●       Having regard to the location, characteristics and use of this site, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and included instead within the village inset.

**Inspector's Conclusions**

3.5.99       The Council's proposal for the Taylor Business Park is the third of a package of measures which includes land to the west and north of this site (reported under LPS2 and LPS3/AS22 respectively). In the Deposit Draft Plan the area of the business park is designated as part of the proposed Green Belt surrounding Culcheth. **Taylor Estates**, together with several firms based at the business park and a number of other **individual Objectors**, sought the exclusion of this (and adjoining) land from the designated area. In response the Council included within its Proposed Changes document a revision to the Proposals Map (Map 3) which shows this site within the village inset. The **Culcheth and Glazebury Action Group**, which has objected to this entire package of measures and received support for its case from a considerable number of local residents, argues that the Deposit Draft designation should be reinstated.

3.5.100      I have already described this site and its immediate surroundings in my conclusions on Area of Search 22 [see para 3.AS22.2]. Given the highly-developed nature of this business park, it plainly does not possess the characteristic of openness and, in itself, serves none of the well-acknowledged Green Belt purposes. Moreover because of its scale, appearance and proximity to the edge of the settlement, its role as part of the countryside hereabouts is negligible; it is effectively already part of the built-up area and the Plan (as proposed for change) rightly recognises this.

3.5.101      I appreciate that, as the **Action Group** points out, for a considerable period of time the Culcheth Linear Park has been regarded for development control purposes as the boundary to the Green Belt around this part of the village; it certainly clearly defines the edge of the existing main settlement area. However the Green Belt boundary as now defined by the Council is firm and defensible, largely following as it does the outer edge of the business park; it reflects the clear division on the ground between areas of completely contrasting character.

3.5.102      The **Action Group's** other main arguments are similar to those raised against the proposals for the westward extension of the business park and Area of Search 22. My general conclusions on those cases are equally applicable here. No environmental harm would arise, no Green Belt principles would be compromised and no exceptional circumstances need to be demonstrated.

3.5.103 Given the foregoing considerations, and bearing in mind my recommendations to exclude the adjoining land to the west and north from the proposed Green Belt, the case for adopting the Council's Proposed Change is overwhelming.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.104 That the Plan be modified by the exclusion from the Green Belt of land at the Taylor Business Park, Culcheth and by its inclusion instead within the village inset in accordance with Proposed Change Map 3.

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### Glazebrook - Land to the north-east of Glazebrook

OBJECTIONS:	O/10878/LPS5/02929	Dominium Properties Ltd
	O/05945/LPS3/02929	Dominium Properties Ltd
	(part reported)	

#### Primary Issues

3.5.105 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, and given the longer-term development land supply position, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead as an Area of Search.

#### Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.106 This case concerns a large area of open farmland lying due east of a ribbon of properties which constitutes one of the 2 main blocks of development in the small community of Glazebrook. To the south is the Liverpool-Manchester railway line beyond which is the land comprising Area of Search 13. On the eastern side of the objection site is the River Glaze valley; there is open land further on. There are fields directly to the north, while westwards beyond the properties fronting Glazebrook Lane is open countryside. I have already described in some detail the nature of this settlement and its surroundings in reporting on the objections relating to Area of Search 13.

3.5.107 The present site is, by reason of its scale and nature, plainly open in character and appearance and it forms an integral part of the stretch of countryside around Glazebrook; the absence of any significant physical boundary features on the northern and eastern sides of the defined site strengthens this relationship. As such, the objection land makes a valuable contribution to the Green Belt hereabouts serving essentially the same purposes as Area of

Search 13 [see paras 3.AS13.6 + 9]. In this connection I observe that the adjoining built-up part of the settlement is "washed over" by the Green Belt designation in the Local Plan.

3.5.108 If this land were safeguarded, as the Objector proposes, and in the longer-term brought forward for development this would represent a major expansion of the present, very limited built-up area which would be both wholly out of keeping with Glazebrook and seriously damaging to the character and appearance of these predominantly rural surroundings. Additionally the objection site suffers the same disbenefits as Area of Search 13 regarding the apparent lack of locally available social and community services, and employment opportunities [see para 3.AS13.14]. Also, this is Grade 2 agricultural land and is therefore of the best and most versatile quality which national guidance says should be protected from development. My comments on this issue generally are set out earlier [see paras 3.AS1.8 - 11]. While I have concluded in relation to several other cases that there are specific reasons justifying the allocation of such land for either immediate or longer-term development purposes, no weightier considerations of that sort arise on this occasion.

3.5.109 Given those circumstances, I conclude that it is necessary to keep this land permanently open; the Local Plan is therefore right to designate it as part of the Green Belt.

3.5.110 In reaching this conclusion I have taken into account the longer-term development land supply position. From my assessment of this matter under Policy LPS3 I am satisfied that while there is a requirement to identify further land for safeguarding purposes, there is simply no need to release the present site. A sufficient reserve of such land can be provided from other more acceptable sources of supply either allocated by the Plan already or additionally recommended by me for adoption.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.111 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to these objections.

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### Glazebrook - Land west of Glazebrook Lane

OBJECTION: O/08317/LPS5/04531 Mr N Green

#### Primary Issues

3.5.112 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead as an Area of Search.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.113 This is a large open field situated to the south-west of the main area of development constituting the small community of Glazebrook. To the north is a former military camp (now included within Area of Search 13) but in all other directions there is open farmland. I have already described in some detail the nature of this settlement and its surroundings in reporting on the objections relating to Area of Search 13.

3.5.114 Due to its scale and nature, this site clearly possesses the characteristic of openness and, because of its intimate relationship with surrounding open land, it falls naturally within the continuous stretch of countryside west of the built-up area of Salford. Given those circumstances it has an important role to play as part of the Green Belt hereabouts serving essentially the same purposes as Area of Search 13 [see paras 3.AS13.6 + 9].

3.5.115 In fact its association with that Area of Search is the principal ground on which the Objector's case rests. It is claimed that potential access difficulties which the development of the allocation site would face would be overcome by the inclusion of the present land, with its frontage to the main road, within the safeguarded area. My recommendation that Area of Search 13 should be deleted negates that argument.

3.5.116 If the objection land were safeguarded, and eventually released for housing and other purposes, any scheme would appear as a substantial and relatively isolated block of development very poorly related to the established built-up area of Glazebrook. As a result significant harm would be caused to the character of this settlement and its essentially rural surroundings. Thus, I consider it is important that this site be kept permanently open in accordance with the Local Plan's intentions.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.117 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to this objection.

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### Glazebury - Land opposite the Chat Moss PH, Warrington Road

OBJECTIONS:	O/05818/LPS5/02888	Mr A K Sharpe
	O/05819/C2/02888	Mr A K Sharpe

### Primary Issues

3.5.118 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, and given the housing land supply position, should it be excluded from the

proposed Green Belt, be included instead within the village inset and be allocated for housing purposes within the Plan period.

### **Inspector's Conclusions**

3.5.119 Glazebury is a small, linear village in generally rural surroundings. The objection site comprises a small area of open ground which fronts Warrington Road. Directly north of this site is a tall railway embankment with the settlement extending beyond, while to the south the road frontage comprises a tight-knit ribbon of houses. The frontage opposite is also built-up, albeit less densely. The land behind the present site is open.

3.5.120 This stretch of Warrington Road has a distinctly built-up appearance and for the most part this is properly recognised in the Plan in terms of the definition of the village inset boundaries. The fact that the objection land is undeveloped does not change the perception of this entire frontage as being an integral part of the settlement. The Council maintains that the presence of open gaps within the otherwise developed frontages of Warrington Road is a characteristic of Glazebury. I found no significant evidence of this during my inspection; nor does the Proposals Map (as revised in the Proposed Changes document) reveal any such pattern. This site has the appearance and character of a vacant plot in built-up surroundings and I am convinced the Plan is wrong to designate it as Green Belt; it serves none of the acknowledged purposes of such an area. If it were developed for housing it would complete the built-up frontage in this vicinity in a perfectly logical manner and be unlikely to cause any material harm to the character and appearance of either Glazebury or its surroundings.

3.5.121 Accordingly on site-specific grounds alone the objection land should be excluded from the Green Belt and included instead within the village inset. Although in dealing with this case I have had regard to the current housing land supply position (as explained under Policy LPS2), in view of the limited size of this site and the foregoing considerations this matter has not influenced my conclusions.

3.5.122 As for the Objector's additional request that the present site should be allocated for housing purposes in the Plan, this would not be appropriate. This land measures only some 0.3 ha. Thus it falls within the classification of a "small site" which PPG3 says authorities should not normally attempt to identify in their land supply studies. The Local Plan's assessment of housing provision (in the changed version of Policy LPS2) follows that guidance by making only an overall allowance for the estimated contribution from small sites. It would therefore be inconsistent and inadvisable to allocate this particular site in the way the Objector seeks. Any development potential which the objection land may have can be adequately determined by reference to the provisions of Policy C2.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.123 That:

(i) the Proposals Map be modified by the exclusion from the Green Belt of land opposite the Chat Moss PH, Warrington Road, Glazebury (identified on the plan accompanying the objection particulars) and by its inclusion instead within the village inset;

(ii) no modification to the Plan be made in response to these objections insofar as they propose the allocation of this site for housing purposes.

### Glazebury - Land at the northern end of Glazebury

OBJECTIONS:	O/05918/LPS5/02911	Mr H J Genders
	OPC/16394/C2.5/02911	Mr H J Genders

### Primary Issues

3.5.124 ● Are there exceptional circumstances which justify altering the designated Green Belt boundary so as to include within the village inset land and properties to the east and west of Warrington Road.

### Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.125 It is appropriate to consider first the general background to the way in which the Local Plan, including the Council's Proposed Changes, has dealt with the northern part of the settlement of Glazebury. In the Deposit Draft Plan the village inset terminated just south of Hurst Mill Lane coinciding with the original administrative boundary between Warrington and the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan. Thus the northerly continuation of the built-up settlement beyond that boundary was not included; this area was shown as Green Belt which reflected its designation in both the then Deposit Draft Wigan UDP and the adopted Greater Manchester Green Belt Local Plan. In 1994 an area of land including the northern end of Glazebury was transferred into Warrington Borough. As part of its Proposed Changes the Council sought to create a more logical village inset/Green Belt boundary by extending the inset northwards to include a considerable number of additional properties along both sides of Warrington Road. These circumstances are evidently deemed by the Council to be sufficiently exceptional to justify the alteration of Greater Manchester's adopted Green Belt boundaries; I comment on this particular point in more detail later in this report [see para 9.2.14].



3.5.126 **Mr Genders'** objection, in essence, is that the Proposed Changes do not go far enough. Having carefully inspected the area, I agree. In judging an objection to Policy C2 [see paras 9.2.12 + 13] I have formed the opinion that the Council is right in principle to extend the village inset to cover properties within the former Greater Manchester Green Belt. Yet there seems to be no sense in defining the new northernmost limits strictly in the manner shown in the Proposed Changes.

3.5.127 Directly outside the proposed village boundary, on the eastern side of Warrington Road, is Speakman House; this is a large residential property within whose grounds is a substantial barn now in use as a separate dwelling-unit with permission for further conversion to a guest-house. This curtilage, although quite sizeable, is plainly residential in character and appearance and, in my judgement, serves no useful Green Belt purpose. It contrasts markedly with the open land to its north and east and its boundaries are well defined mostly by mature trees and hedgerows which create an appreciable measure of containment. This property, although clearly different in nature from the semi-detached houses to its south, is just as much part of the recognisable built-up settlement as they are. On the western side of Warrington Road, beyond a small group of cottages which mark the proposed inset limits, is a public house; this is part of the continuous built-up frontage and it is illogical for the Plan to seek to create an artificial division between these neighbouring properties. Behind the public house is a row of 3 dwellings which, by reason of their nature and close relationship with the frontage properties, also have the appearance of being an integral part of the built-up settlement. They are noticeably different in character from the land and buildings which otherwise surround them; the Plan should acknowledge this contrast.

3.5.128 However there is no such merit in the rest of **Mr Genders'** proposal. He also seeks to include within the village inset a group of buildings due west of the row of 3 dwellings. This comprises a farmhouse and barns in a fairly tight-knit arrangement; there is also what appears to be an area of commercial storage alongside. To my mind this group is not untypical of the sort of buildings often found in countryside fringe locations. Also, due to their disposition about the site and their use and appearance, they are not too well related to the nearby dwellings from which they are separated by a narrow lane; and they are relatively remote from the main road properties. For these reasons there is nothing inappropriate about the Plan's designation of this group as part of the Green Belt.

3.5.129 Given those considerations, I conclude that the village inset should be extended to include Speakman House, together with the barn and their joint curtilage (as defined on the Objector's plan), the public house and the row of 3 dwellings directly to its west. No alteration should be made to the Plan however in relation to the group of buildings beyond the lane which marks the western edge of that row. With these modifications Green Belt purposes would be better served, the designated area would gain greater credibility and its inner boundary would become much firmer and more defensible; and naturally the village inset too would be more logically and appropriately defined. In all, these considerations, taken together with the implications of the change in the administrative areas, represent exceptional circumstances justifying the alteration of the formerly adopted Green Belt boundary.

## RECOMMENDATION

- 3.5.130 That the Proposals Map be modified by the exclusion from the Green Belt of land at the northern end of Glazebury comprising the curtilages of Speakman House and Barn, the public house west of Warrington Road and the row of 3 dwellings further to the west (all, save for the land and buildings to the west of the lane leading southwards which marks the western edge of the row of 3 dwellings, as shown on the plan dated 26 April 1996 attached to Document 2911d accompanying objections 5918 and 16394 - Mr Genders) and by its inclusion instead within the village inset.

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### Lymm - Land at Reddish Lane

OBJECTIONS:	O/05840/LPS5/02896	Mr S Walley
	O/05839/LPS3/02896	Mr S Walley

#### Primary Issues

- 3.5.131 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead as an Area of Search.

#### Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.132 This site is part of an area of mainly open farmland situated between Rushgreen Road and the Trans-Pennine Trail, a major pedestrian and cycle way on the route of a former railway. The westernmost section of this open stretch of land is allocated in the Plan as Area of Search 14; this is adjoined by the built-up area of Lymm extending to the south and west. Beyond the former railway, much of which consists of an embankment, is open countryside. To the east of the present site is a substantial area of housing, while the southern side of Rushgreen Road is also well built-up, mostly in depth.

3.5.133 I consider it appropriate and necessary to take this entire stretch of open land into account at this stage because in land-use planning terms the present site, by reason of its nature, appearance and configuration and the absence of any significant physical features along most of its west and south-west facing field boundaries, is indistinguishable from the adjoining farmland. The objection site itself is open in nature and, together with the fields to its west, clearly gives definition to the existing built-up edge of the settlement. However none of this stretch can realistically be regarded as open countryside. From most vantage points it is seen against the backdrop of residential properties to the east, south and west and

this has a noticeable urbanising influence on these immediate surroundings. There are also a few dwellings within the subject area close to the present site which help reduce any sense of openness still more. Also, significantly, along the northern boundary the Trans-Pennine Trail establishes a clear division between this stretch of land and the extensive area of open countryside beyond; and even though in the vicinity of the objection site the embankment gradually flattens out to natural ground level the contrast in character between the areas on either side is still quite distinct. These surrounding features combine to create a noticeable measure of enclosure around this entire stretch of land and as such it has a far greater affinity with the surrounding built-up area than with the open countryside beyond the former railway.

3.5.134 A major argument raised by the Council is the need to maintain an open gap between Lymm and Oughtrington which, it is claimed, are physically separate settlements. This is the same point as made by Objectors to the Areas of Search 14 and 15 allocations. For the reasons explained earlier [see paras 3.AS14.4 and 3.AS15.10 - 12] I do not regard these as separate settlements in recognised land-use planning terms; and accordingly any open space, such as the stretch of land here, which does exist between these 2 communities cannot reasonably be regarded as a "gap" in the sense described by PPG2. On that understanding, and given the particular circumstances of the farmland between Rushgreen Road and the Trans-Pennine Trail as described above, in my judgement this area does not serve any significant Green Belt purpose and there is no compelling reason why it should be kept permanently open.

3.5.135 If this land were safeguarded, and in the longer-term developed, in no sense would there be any measure of uncontrolled urban sprawl or encroachment into open countryside; development here would be well contained by the former railway line which represents an entirely logical and defensible Green Belt boundary. Indeed this feature already marks the designated boundary (and hence the settlement limit) for a noticeable distance in both directions.

3.5.136 As for other considerations arising from the guidance in PPG2 on the identification of land for safeguarding, in broad terms my conclusions about the acceptability of Areas of Search 14 and 15 (north sector) [see paras 3.AS14.6 + 7 and 3.AS15.16 + 19] in relation to development impact, both locally and settlement-wide, and social infrastructure apply equally here. Furthermore I note the Council raises no arguments in this case on technical infrastructure, landscape, ecological or agricultural land quality grounds.

3.5.137 I have also taken into account the longer-term development land supply position. My views on the Council's general approach regarding the need to safeguard certain land notwithstanding its Green Belt potential are set out earlier in this report [see paras 3.AS2.3 + 4]. Additionally, it is clear from my examination of the objections to Policy LPS3 that yet further sites must be identified as Areas of Search in this Plan. The potential contribution which the present objection site and adjoining land could make in this regard is considerable, both in terms of extending the overall scale of provision and adding more variety to the range of sizes and general distribution of the Areas of Search.

3.5.138 In all the circumstances I am convinced that for present Plan purposes this land has a much more valuable role to play as part of the reserve of safeguarded sites than as Green Belt. I am mindful however that a formal objection (by Mr Walley) has been made

only in respect of the more easterly section of this stretch of land; accordingly my recommendation to modify the Local Plan must be confined to that specified site. As for the remainder, I would urge the Council to give serious consideration to the foregoing conclusions with a view to treating this entire stretch of land in exactly the same way, as the circumstances dictate it should be, namely as an Area of Search. In this connection I would confirm that, in anticipation of the Council's agreement to this course of action, I have included in my calculations of the estimated longer-term land supply (under Policy LPS3) the full area north of Rushgreen Road (between Reddish Crescent and Area of Search 14) which appears to measure in the order of 9 ha.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.139 That:

(i) the Plan be modified by the exclusion from the Green Belt of land at Reddish Lane, Lymm (identified on the plan accompanying the objection particulars) and by its allocation instead as an Area of Search under the provisions of Policy LPS3;

(ii) the Council gives serious consideration to the merits of the land situated between the site described in (i) above and Area of Search 14 with a view to assessing its suitability for safeguarding for possible longer-term development purposes under the provisions of Policy LPS3 and to modifying the Plan accordingly.

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### Lymm - Land south of Massey Brook Lane

OBJECTION: O/05936/LPS5/02921

Exors of E Morris Dec'd

#### Primary Issues

- 3.5.140 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, and given the longer-term housing land supply position, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead as an Area of Search.

#### Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.141 This is a substantial area of farmland just beyond the western edge of the settlement of Lymm. Along the northern boundary of this site is Massey Brook Lane directly

beside which is the Bridgewater Canal; there is open land beyond. On all other sides there are fields although there are a few properties fronting the roadside nearby.

3.5.142 By reason of its scale and nature the objection site is plainly open in character and, given its location, it is an integral part of the stretch of countryside surrounding Lymm. As such it makes an important contribution to the Green Belt hereabouts in terms of helping check urban sprawl and assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. If the Objector's proposal were accepted, and the site eventually brought forward for housing purposes, this would represent a relatively isolated block of development completely unrelated to the established built-up area, the western limits of which are well defined. This would cause appreciable harm to the character and appearance of these rural surroundings. Moreover the open land which separates this site from the built-up area would then be put at serious risk from further development; the effect of this would be to worsen still more the environmental damage to this stretch of open countryside.

3.5.143 The Objector claims that it is essential to add this site to the reserve of safeguarded land in order to ensure that sufficient provision is made for future housing development needs. However from my examination of the longer-term land supply position under Policy LPS3 I am satisfied there is nothing to justify that proposition. An adequate reserve of such land can be provided from other far more acceptable sources of supply either allocated by the Plan already or additionally recommended by me for adoption.

3.5.144 The Green Belt arguments in this case are overwhelming; the inner boundaries of the designated area are firm and defensible and they should remain unaltered.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.145 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to this objection.

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### Lymm - Land at Lymm Hey Lane

OBJECTION:            O/06209/LPS5/02971            North West Water Ltd

#### Primary Issues

- 3.5.146            ●            Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and allocated instead as an Area of Search.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.147 This is an area of mainly open land used for grazing and as allotments. A pumping station building stands to the west of Lymm Hey Lane which divides this site. The southern boundary is marked by the line of a former railway which is now part of the Trans-Pennine Trail, a long distance pedestrian and cycle way; beyond that is the built-up area of Lymm and the site allocated by the Local Plan as Area of Search 14. The objection land is otherwise adjoined by a golf course, playing fields and farmland.

3.5.148 The present site, due to its nature and location, relates well to the extensive area of open countryside surrounding the northern limits of Lymm. It is clearly divorced from the built-up settlement by the former railway which, being on an embankment in this vicinity, creates a substantial physical barrier. In these circumstances I consider that, contrary to the Objector's belief, this site plays a valuable Green Belt role in terms of helping check urban sprawl and protecting the countryside from encroachment; it is therefore vital that it be kept permanently open. The adjacent boundary of the designated area as defined by this Plan is the line of the former railway; this is logical, firm and defensible and there is no justification for any modification.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.149 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to this objection.

## Lymm - Land at Yeald Brow

OBJECTIONS:	OPC/16397/LPS5/03969	Lymm Parish Council
	OPC/16398/PROPMAP/03969	Lymm Parish Council

## Primary Issues

- 3.5.150
- Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and included instead within the village inset.

## Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.151 This is a small area of open ground at the western edge of the settlement of Lymm. In the Deposit Draft Plan it was shown as part of the Green Belt. However in the Proposed Changes document, on a map which was produced in order to confirm another

matter, this site was erroneously included in the defined village inset. **Lymm Parish Council** calls for the reinstatement of the subject land as Green Belt.

3.5.152 The Borough Council admits there was no intention to change the original designation; it has now submitted a Further Suggested Change (FSC3-a) which rectifies this matter and thereby overcomes the **Parish Council's** objections.

3.5.153 On site-specific grounds I see no reason to disagree with the parties' shared opinion. In the circumstances no modification to the Deposit Draft Plan should be made.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.154 That no modification be made to the Plan in response to these objections.

### Oughtrington - Birchbrook House, Rushgreen

OBJECTION:            O/00445/LPS5/00195                            Mr G J Turner

#### Primary Issues

- 3.5.155                    ●        Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt and included instead within the village inset.

#### Inspector's Conclusions

3.5.156        Birchbrook House occupies a triangular-shaped curtilage situated at the junction of Birchbrook Road with the Trans-Pennine Trail, a major pedestrian/cycle way which utilises the line of a former railway, on the eastern fringe of Oughtrington. On the opposite side of the road is an area of housing and a patch of open ground which the Local Plan includes within the village inset. There is also housing beyond the road/ex-rail crossing to the west. On the southern side of the objection property is a major industrial works. The Deposit Draft Plan shows these premises as part of the Green Belt but at the Proposed Changes stage they were included within the village inset; this is the subject of objections which I deal with next [see paras 3.5.163 - 169]. Adjoining Birchbrook House on the eastern side is a derelict house and, further on, an open field.

3.5.157        The objection site is only of modest proportions and has the obvious appearance and character of a residential curtilage. It is virtually surrounded by buildings and in no sense does it possess the characteristic of openness. In physical terms it is closely

related to the established built-up area and when viewed from almost every available vantage point the influence of the essentially urban nature of its immediate surroundings is inescapable. It is therefore anomalous for the Plan to treat the objection land as if it were part of the open countryside.

3.5.158 The Council maintains that this property helps check the unrestricted sprawl of the settlement and safeguards the countryside from encroachment. I disagree. Given its limited size and noticeable measure of containment as well as the extent of separation which there is from what can genuinely be regarded as open countryside, namely the fields further east, this site serves neither of those purposes; nor does it perform any other acknowledged Green Belt function.

3.5.159 Taking those considerations into account and given the extent to which the village inset as defined by the Plan and in the Proposed Changes document (which I intend endorsing) spreads beyond the present site boundaries, it is entirely logical and appropriate that Birchbrook House should be included within this inset.

3.5.160 In fact I would urge the Council to take this a step further. To my mind the case for including the adjoining derelict property within the inset boundary is just as strong. It too has residential characteristics and is far better related to the built-up area than to the open countryside to its east. The division between these areas, along the tree-lined brook which marks the outer boundary of the curtilage of this property, is clear on the ground. If the Council were to agree to this course of action (and at the Inquiry its officers confirmed the sense in treating this property in the same way as Birchbrook House) the result would be wholly beneficial to the Green Belt hereabouts; the integrity of the designated area would be enhanced and the newly-defined inner boundary would be much firmer and more defensible than that which the Local Plan currently proposes.

## RECOMMENDATION

3.5.161 That:

- (i) the Proposals Map be modified by the exclusion from the Green Belt of land comprising the curtilage of Birchbrook House, Rushgreen (identified on the plan at Appendix 2 of Document 195a accompanying objection 445 - Mr Turner) and by its inclusion instead within the village inset;
  - (ii) the Council gives serious consideration to the merits of the land comprising the curtilage of the residential property to the east of Birchbrook House with a view to assessing its suitability for inclusion within the village inset and to modifying the Plan accordingly.
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**Oughtrington - Hubert Jones Tankworks site, Carlton Road**

OBJECTIONS:	O/05963/LPS5/02935 (part reported)	Hubert Jones Ltd
	O-PC11418/C2.8/00711 (part reported)	Mr John Alfred Eland
	O-PC/16483/C2.8/02850	Oughtrington Community Association
	O-PC/11285/C2.8/03696 (part reported)	Mr & Mrs R J Rurlander
	O-PC/11217/C2.8/03699	Sylvia Cleary
	O-PC/11212/C2.8/03700	Sharron Anne Cochrane
	O-PC/11220/C2.8/03701	Mr William M Cleary
	O-PC/11207/C2.8/03731	Mr Arthur John Davies
	O-PC/11574/C2.8/03745 (part reported)	Mr Robert Alan Nelson
	O-PC/11456/C2.8/03786	Mr & Mrs K Roe
	O-PC/11522/C2.8/03788	Mr & Mrs P Wardle
	O-PC/11540/C2.8/05358	Dr & Mrs C J Dover

**Primary Issues**

- 3.5.162 ● Having regard to the location and characteristics of this site, and given the housing land supply position, should it be excluded from the proposed Green Belt, be included instead within the village inset and be allocated for housing purposes within the Plan period.

**Inspector's Conclusions**

3.5.163 This is a large industrial works on the western edge of the built-up area of Oughtrington; it includes a range of sizeable buildings and an extensive amount of open storage mainly of large-scale plant and equipment. To the north are 2 residential properties (described in more detail in the preceding case [see para 3.5.156]) and an open field, while on the eastern side is part of the hamlet of Heatley. There is a large pond and farmland to the south. Along the western edge of this site are several other industrial premises all of which are the subject of this case. Further west beyond Millers Lane, is open land although a significant area of this is included, under the provisions of certain Proposed Changes which have not been contested, within the village inset.

3.5.164 In the Deposit Draft Plan this area of industrial land is shown as part of the Green Belt. At the Proposed Changes stage the Council, in response to an objection from Hubert Jones Ltd, extended the village inset to include this site. Arising from that change a number of counter-objections have been received from the **Oughtrington Community Association** and individual **local residents**. Their basic argument is that this land should be reinstated as Green Belt because there is a need to maintain an open gap between

Oughtrington and Heatley. It is further claimed that the extension of the village inset as now proposed by the Council would, because of the likelihood of redevelopment occurring, lead to the coalescence of these communities, result in the loss of valuable local employment opportunities and cause harm both to the adjoining area of Heatley Flash which is a Site of Biological Importance (SBI) and to general environmental standards in this immediate area.

3.5.165 To my mind the Council's latest preferred approach to this site is entirely right. Due to the number and scale of buildings here and the extent and nature of open storage, the objection land has a noticeable built-up appearance; and being on the edge of a substantial settlement with which it is visually well related it would be wholly inappropriate to designate this as Green Belt. This site performs none of the functions (as described in national guidance) normally associated with such areas. The local concern about the Oughtrington/Heatley gap is misplaced. Heatley comprises only a small collection of properties "washed over" by the Green Belt. The amount of any genuine open space between the western edge of those properties and the main built-up settlement is quite limited and is confined to the northern and southern extremities of this linear hamlet. The objection site, because of its appearance and general character, contributes nothing to any sense of separation which could reasonably be perceived between Heatley and Oughtrington; on the contrary it, almost alone, creates a distinct thread of development which effectively links them physically together.

3.5.166 The Proposed Changes (part of both LPS5-1 and C2-b) accurately reflect these circumstances and I shall endorse them. The result will be to establish a more credible Green Belt and to define a boundary between the village inset and the designated area which is firmer and more defensible than that which the Deposit Draft Plan proposes.

3.5.167 Local fears about the possible impact of development are also unfounded. Proposals on land within village insets would be considered against the provisions of Plan Policy C2 which are aimed at protecting the local environment and safeguarding the interests of the rural economy; other Plan policies are designed to ensure that new development causes no material harm to SBIs. There is certainly no basis on these grounds for including the present site in the Green Belt.

3.5.168 As for Hubert Jones' remaining argument about allocating this land for housing, I share the Council's view that this would not be appropriate. While from my assessment under Policy LPS2 of the current land supply position there is clearly a need to allocate further sites for development within the Plan period, there is also an important employment policy consideration at stake in relation to the Objector's proposal. National guidance emphasises the need to promote healthy economic activity in rural areas and, in broad terms, to secure a reasonable balance between local housing and employment provision. Much of Policy C2 seems to be centred on that guidance. Given that the objection site is in active employment use, it would be premature to confirm its acceptability for housing purposes without a thorough understanding of the ramifications for the local economy. The development control process would provide the opportunity for undertaking an appropriate assessment of such matters. I accept the Objector's point that the Plan generally should aim to convey certainty and should make every effort to identify sites larger than those categorised as windfalls. However in the circumstances of the present case a positive allocation at this stage cannot be justified especially given that strategic housing requirements for the period to 2001, and in the immediate short term beyond, can be satisfactorily met from other more