



Local Plan Team
Planning Policy and Programmes
Warrington Borough Council
New Town House
Buttermarket Street
Warrington WA1 2NH

Date: 14 June 2019
Ref: 030-001
By email: localplan@warrington.gov.uk

Dear Sir or Madam,

Hillcrest, Knutsford Road, Grappenhall – Cruden Group Representations to Proposed Submission Draft Warrington Local Plan

We act for Cruden Group, a long standing construction and property group which has been operating in the Warrington region since the 1940s. The Group's activities encompass principal contracting, property maintenance and some limited property development. The Group currently employs around 200 people directly, and many more indirectly through subcontractors and agency labour. The majority of the staff operate out of the Group's Head Quarters which has, for many years, been located at Hillcrest, on the Knutsford Road about a kilometre south of Grappenhall.

The Site is relatively modest, extending to 0.52 ha and comprises previously-developed land within the existing Green Belt, but with convenient access to the motorway network. The Site is currently occupied by offices and parking having previously been converted from petrol filling station and café which was originally constructed in the 1930s. The structure comprises traditional load bearing masonry walls and consequently, the internal layout is heavily constrained. The building is highly inefficient with a high proportion of internal circulation space and, overall, the building is in need of considerable investment.

For these reasons and to release capital to invest in its business, Cruden has been seeking to move for the past three years to more suitable premises with a more open plan environment to encourage collaboration within the business.

In 2017, Cruden engaged in pre-application consultation with the Council to explore the potential to secure planning consent for the redevelopment of their Site for a handful of new homes to facilitate their move. An application was duly submitted but withdrawn after it became apparent that officers would not support the redevelopment of this brown field site due to it falling within the designated Green Belt. Although Cruden had a robust case to demonstrate *very special circumstances* centred on the need to relocate and retain jobs in the borough, the scale of the project didn't warrant the cost of a public inquiry.

In this context, Cruden welcomes the submission draft Plan, which proposes the Hillcrest Site is released from the Green Belt as a part of the Garden Suburb extension proposed to the south of Warrington under draft Policy MD2.

Policy MD2 states that the Council is *'committed to working with landowners to prepare a development framework including more detailed masterplans'* which would form the basis of planning applications in the future. Despite being one of the few owner-occupiers of land in this location, Cruden has not been approached to input or comment on any conceptual masterplan or the subsequent Development Framework, which form the evidence base for this policy.

It remains Cruden's objective to relocate to alternative premises however, depending on the phasing of the proposed Garden Suburb, these plans (and hence the viability of the business) could be severely impacted. Cruden therefore requests that the Council involves them as an important local business and landowner in the proposed Garden Suburb plans to facilitate redevelopment to secure their early relocation and to ensure that Cruden's plans are aligned with the emerging masterplan.

Furthermore, we note that neither Policy MD2 nor any of the supporting evidence refers to the Cruden site as a parcel of previously developed land within the proposed urban extension. This should be rectified and the MD2 policy text should also recognise that the Site benefits from full services as well as an existing direct access to the A50.

Policy MD2 refers to *'proportionate contributions'* towards infrastructure from developers however, as referred to above, the Site already benefits from services and Cruden is seeking to release the capital from its relatively modest site to enable the business to relocate. Releasing the capital tied up in the property would significantly assist in financing investment in growth, and the relocation to a more appropriate office environment would improve the transport links for staff and clients; improve the amenities available and hence make Cruden a more attractive employer, helping recruitment and retention of staff and significantly improving their environmental credentials.

Cruden takes its responsibilities as an employer extremely seriously. Its award-winning employee and community engagement programme, Escalate, has had great success in identifying talent and enabling staff development across the workforce. The majority of senior staff have risen through the ranks and retaining and developing staff is therefore a key element of the business strategy. Improving the quality and location of the head office, as well as improved local amenities, comprises an important element to delivering that strategy.

Cruden therefore requests that the policy text is amended to acknowledge these particular circumstances and that any future delivery strategy seeks only fair and proportionate contributions from landowners. We look forward to receiving confirmation of receipt of this letter, and to working with the Council to develop a development plan which is reflective of both the Borough's and our client's ambitions.

Yours faithfully,

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Bill Davidson

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