

Warrington Borough Council Draft Local Plan

Representations on behalf of Cherry Farm
Trading

CONTACT DETAILS

AGENT

Name: Nia Borsey

Company: Fisher German LLP

Address: Fisher German LLP,
4-5 Vicar's Lane,
Chester,
Cheshire,
CH1 1QU

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 These representations are made by Fisher German on behalf of Cherry Farm Trading in respect of the Warrington Draft Local Plan Consultation.
- 1.2 Our client owns land at Cherry Hall Farm, Cherry Lane, Lymm, to the east of the M6 and north of M56 motorways. The site extends to approximately 37.5 hectares in area. The site was previously submitted during the 'Call for Sites' exercise and Local Plan Review consultation in 2017.
- 1.3 Alongside these representations, an interested party in the land has made representations also. However, given the circumstances of Caddick Land having an interest and not the landowner, separate representations have been submitted.
- 1.4 The representation intends to comment on the proposed policy content of the Draft Local Plan and whether the Plan complies with the legal requirements of the 'duty to cooperate' and meets the 'Tests of Soundness'. The landowners have a positive approach to the deliverability of the site.

2.0 Examination of Draft Policies

- 2.1 The representations to the following policies are made because they are in my client's interest and have relevance to their estate.

Policy GB1- Green Belt

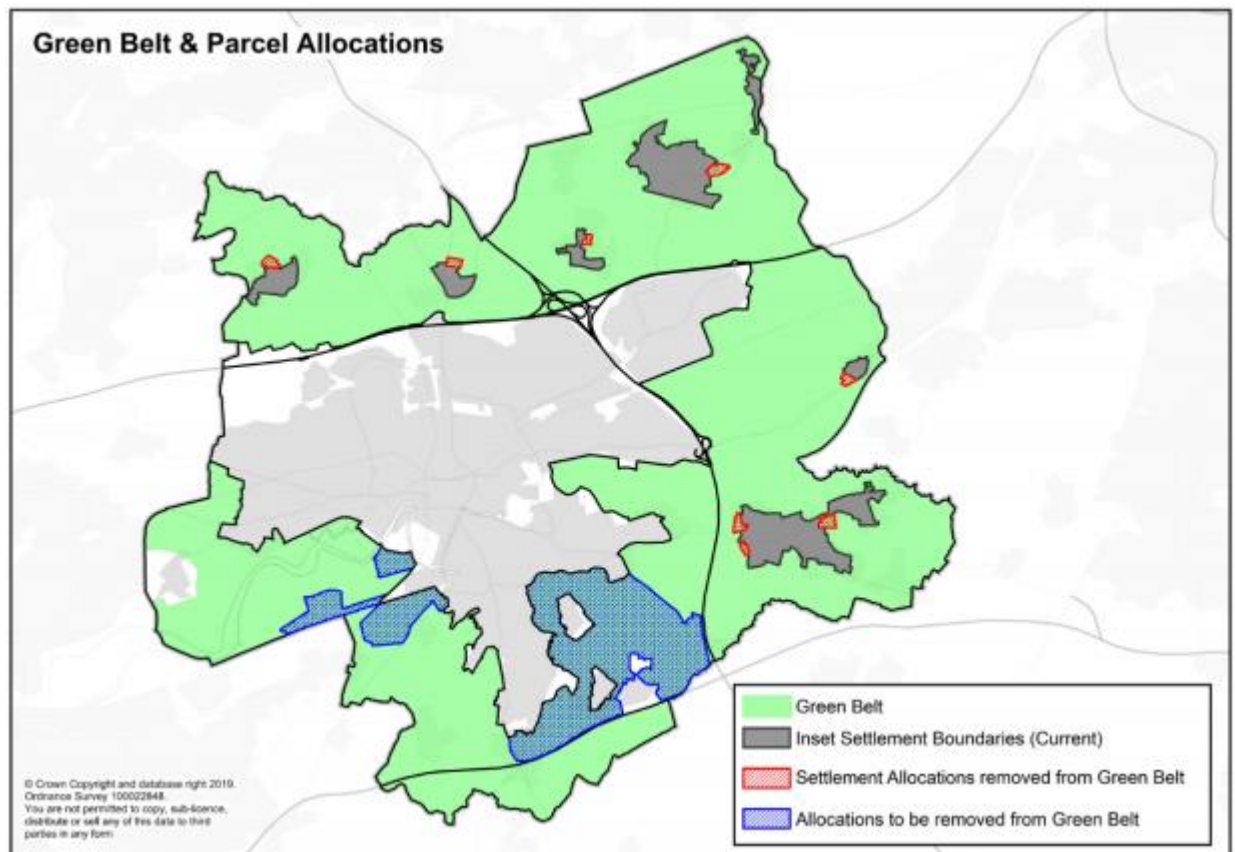
- 2.2 We recognise that Warrington's Green Belt plays an important role in ensuring the separation from neighbouring towns and cities and essentially preventing urban sprawl.
- 2.3 Additionally, we recognise the requirement for Green Belt release to meet the development needs of the Borough. The land proposed for release is around 11% of the current total Warrington Borough Council Green Belt.
- 2.4 Policy GB1 recognises the land which is proposed to be removed from the Green Belt. Although 11% Green Belt release sounds positive for development needs, the land has not been distributed equally borough wide. The largest Green Belt release allocations are focussed in two areas; The Garden Suburb and Warrington's Waterfront/ Port area as seen in Figure 1. The Garden Suburb intends to be a large-scale strategic site providing a multi-use

settlement for the borough. However, this is a risky strategy: if this site or much of this site does not become fully deliverable for development, the Council has essentially targeted Green Belt un-strategically and this makes unplanned release of Green Belt areas elsewhere in the borough more likely.

2.5 The policy recognises that in accordance with national planning policy, within Green Belt, planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development, except in 'very special circumstances. However, the policy does not clarify what factors might be given weight in a case for 'very special circumstances. Although every case must be determined on its own merits, if the Council wishes to have high growth aspirations then reference to economic factors might assist both developers and the Council in assessing whether development proposals will deliver genuine benefits.

Policy DEV1- Housing Delivery

2.6 Four sites have been allocated to be removed from Green Belt on the fringe of Lymm Inset Settlement Boundary to become 'Settlement Allocations', as seen in Figure 1.



2.7 **Figure 1. Green Belt and Parcel Allocations (Warrington Council).**

- 2.8 There have been no strategic sites for residential housing within the Lymm area released from Green Belt: Massey Brook Lane is to provide a minimum of 60 homes, Pool Lane for a minimum of 40 homes, Rushgreen Road/ Tanyard Farm for a minimum of 200 homes (the latest allocation), and finally Warrington Road providing 130 homes. The total comprises a minimum of 430 homes.
- 2.9 The sites allocated within Lymm are solely for residential development, and recognised employment land has not been allocated; however, there are no allocations or mentions of encouragement for mixed-use development around Lymm.
- 2.10 It is essential for settlements to grow in a sustainable manner, and the incorporation of suitable employment land and encouragement for mixed-use schemes is required to make the plan sound. Without this, there is a real danger that Lymm will simply become a dormitory settlement, with residents forced to commute to employment elsewhere. Given that the bulk of allocation is in a very small number of sites away from Lymm, this would reinforce unsustainable patterns of travel. It would be far more sustainable for provision to be made for local employment and mixed-use sites in accessible locations. Lymm would benefit from a development of such nature.

Policy DEV 4- Economic Growth and Development

- 2.11 Warrington recognises the need for an expansion and development of employment land for the borough. Over the plan period provision is to be made for a minimum of 362 hectares for a range of B1, B2 and B8 uses.
- 2.12 The plan intends for the town centres to provide a main location for B1a office development and the existing employment areas will continue as primary locations for industrial, warehousing and distribution.
- 2.13 However, new employment areas will be required to meet the new provision for the 20-year plan period, therefore the policy states the areas which are intended to be removed from Green Belt.
- 2.14 Removing three sites from the Green Belt; Garden Suburb, Port Warrington; and Waterfront Business Hub shall provide a total of 215.83 hectares. The minimum of 362 hectares described initially in the policy includes the existing supply of 83.91ha, the Masterplan total of 31.46ha and St. Helens Omega extension of 31.20ha.

- 2.15 There has only been an agreement in principle with St. Helens Council that the 31.20 hectares of the western extension to the existing Omega employment site proposed in St. Helens Local Plan will contribute to meeting Warrington's employment needs. Therefore, Warrington Council should not be relying on this employment land to deliver for their Local Plan needs. There is significant uncertainty in this regard. We recognise that Local Authorities should work alongside each other in certain cases, and work to deliver as a region, however Warrington's Local Plan should not be based on figures which are not 100% guaranteed deliverable within their borough.
- 2.16 There is a question to be raised regarding whether the Masterplan land comprising 31.46 hectares within the Town Centre can be delivered. Town Centres are facing significant economic challenges, not only in Warrington but throughout the UK, and more than likely employment is leaving for out of town areas which have greater transport links and are strategically located.
- 2.17 Therefore, to safeguard the Borough against the decisions of neighbouring authorities and of ongoing economic challenges, it is eminently logical and reasonable for further employment land to be released from the Green Belt, in addition to the existing draft allocations to make all employment land likely to be deliverable during the Plan period. After all, targets are only ever set as a minimum and it may well be that further release beyond the minimum identified need is essential to allow the Council to meet its growth targets, particularly against a backdrop of economic uncertainty over the next few years due to Brexit amongst other matters. Providing a range of attractive and accessible locations can only help protect the Council against economic uncertainty.
- 2.18 The existing supply of employment land should not be relied upon to grow the borough, particularly given that there is a clear need for both a quantitative and qualitative uplift in allocated employment sites throughout.
- 2.19 Policy DEV4 states the minimum provision of 362 hectares and does not allow for the potential of requiring more land employment land during the Plan period. The Plan should be looking forward to a positive economic approach during the 20-year period and therefore should look to allocate further land than providing the minimum.

- 2.20 The Green Belt requirement was found to be 215.14 hectares and the Council have allocated 215.83 hectares of allocated Green Belt land and comments within the Plan 'which is marginally above the required need'. This point is not false; however, the figure is only very marginally exceeded and there is little evidence of consideration of other areas which may have the potential for a small employment area which can enable economic development of that specific area too.
- 2.21 Providing for the minimum will greatly increase the chance of unplanned sites coming forward, which will only undermine the plan-led approach and represent unsustainable forms of development.
- 2.22 Figure 2 taken from the Warrington Proposed Submission Version Local Plan displays the existing employment areas, and the future employment allocations to be released from Green Belt. Noticeably there is no employment land located in the region around Lymm, and it is questionable why this area has not been considered for a Green Belt release for employment allocation given the clear road network links. As stated above, this can only promote unsustainable patterns of travel and impact on the sustainability of Lymm.

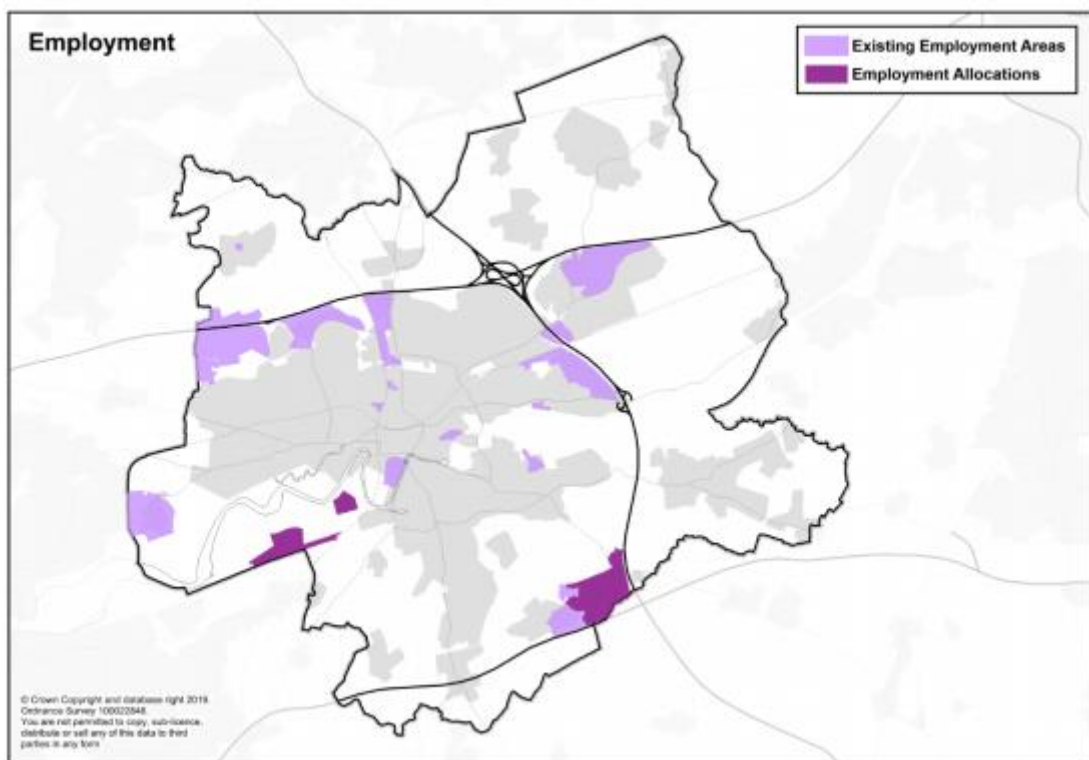


Figure 2. Existing Employment Areas and Employment Allocations (Warrington Council).

3.0 Future employment growth

- 3.1 Warrington Council undertook an analysis of economic and housing numbers in October 2016. Overall concluding forecasts suggests a growth of 19,659 by 2037 to 156,052.
- 3.2 To meet this predicted growth over the Plan period there needs to be the enough employment land available. It isn't simply acceptable to aim only to meet the minimum needs of employment land which has come out of the Local Plans Evidence Base.

4.0 Suitability of Land at Cherry Hall Farm

- 4.1 Land at Cherry Hall Farm was promoted during the 'Call for Sites' process in 2017 (ref: R18/072) as a multi-use site to be released from the Green Belt.
- 4.2 The site has clearly not been released from the Green Belt or allocated for any development, however, does have the potential for creating a mixed-use site on the edge of Lymm.
- 4.3 The site is extremely well located in relation to the infrastructure network, easily accessed from the M6 and M56 motorways which lie to the south and south west of the site. Providing major road links to the North West and the UK.
- 4.4 As recognised no employment land has been allocated around Lymm, and three sites are potentially released from Green Belt for residential development on the edge of the Lymm settlement boundary. The does have some separation from the settlement, but this does not mean it isn't potentially sustainable for a variety of development types, especially commercial.
- 4.5 As discussed, the Garden Suburb Employment Area is a draft allocation in proximity to both M6 and M56, and allocation of both sites either side of the M6 would provide an identified employment hub. The two areas have no possibility of merging as Cherry Hall Farm is not located near the boundary of the M6, therefore the Green Belt land between will act as a buffer, and the M6 will always provide a physical division corridor between the two areas.
- 4.6 The site was assessed as 'Strong' in the Green Belt Assessment 2017 (figure 3) although it was not subject to detailed assessment against the criteria because of its recognised status; therefore, a reason was not provided as to why the outcome was strong. Given the location

of the site, really it should be reassessed, or a reason provided as to why the outcome of the land was 'Strong' rather than a 'Moderate' outcome.

- 4.7 Land allocated as the Garden Suburb Employment Area is in a similar situation as the land is close to the M6 and M56 corridor. It would therefore be irrational to come to a different conclusion for the Cherry Farmland.

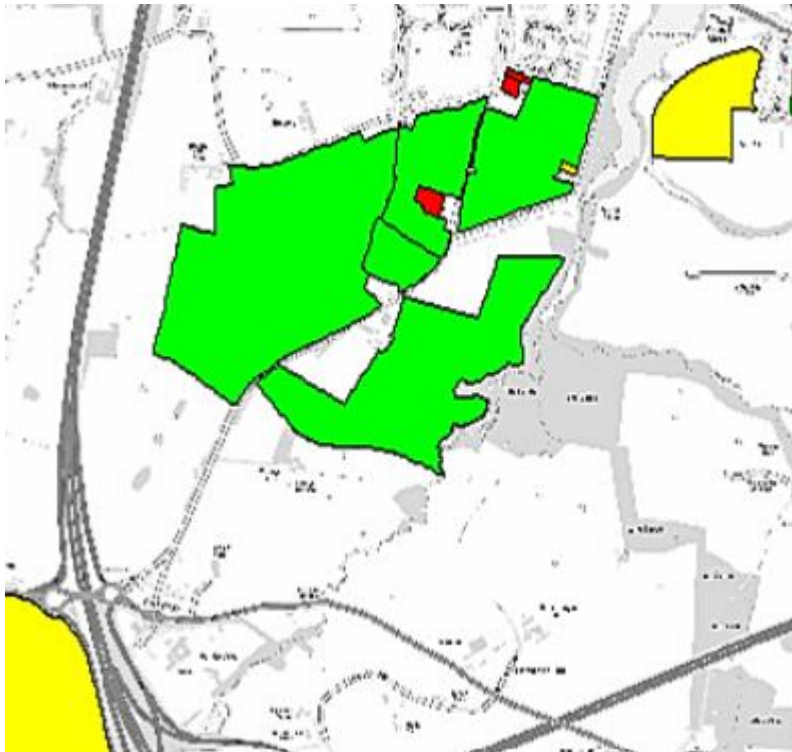


Figure 3. Site identified as 'Strong' (Green) in the Green Belt Assessment (Green Belt Assessment Addendum 2017).

- 4.8 Nationally, the government attaches great importance to Green Belts, with the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy preventing urban sprawl and keeping the land permanently open.
- 4.9 The Green Belt serves five purposes as stated in Paragraph 134 of National Planning Policy Framework (2019). Against those five purposes the following comments can be made:
- a) *To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
Lymm is a modest and well-contained built-up area, and the site will sit as a closely related satellite of the main settlement; therefore, the release of the parcel would not create any sprawl of a large built-up area.
 - b) *To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*

The area of Green Belt and the location of the land would not create the merge of neighbouring towns into one another. The nearest settlements are beyond significant barriers, including the local motorway network.

c) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;

Development of the land will result in some encroachment into the countryside, although the site will read of a closely related satellite to Lymm rather than a wholly isolated form of development. Additionally, the allocation of the site would greatly reduce the possibility of unplanned incursions taking place in areas of the Green Belt likely to be far more sensitive.

d) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and

The parcel of land has no impact on the preservation, setting or special character of historic towns due to its location away from the immediate settlement.

e) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The purpose of the employment allocations is to provide strategic sites to be released from the Green Belt. However, in providing local employment land an improving the sustainability of Lymm, it will assist in uplifting the attractiveness of vacant and under-used land within the town for development.

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 The chosen draft allocations are very rigid and provide no real flexibility if any land becomes undeliverable. The allocations rely on factors outside the Council's control in terms of their deliverability and there is no thought given to providing a suitable buffer, which is surprising given the Council's high growth aspirations.

5.2 The council have taken an approach with employment land as providing three new key areas to 'supposedly sustain' the future employment growth in the region over the Plan period. The areas granted are logical, however further strategic sites should be provided to enhance the employment potential throughout the 20-year period.

5.3 The Council have met their employment land requirement based on evidence, but that should not be the end of the story; the requirement for Green Belt release has been met and only 'marginally' increased. In relation to employment land, the Plan portrays that so long as the minimum has been met, there is not a requirement to plan further for the growth the area is expected to forecast.

- 5.4 If the Council has genuine high-growth ambitions, then this means that crucial decisions need to be made about where and how much land needs to be allocated. The issue of Green Belt release is always controversial, but inevitable if the Council wants to ensure a supply of sustainable and attractive employment land. To create sustainable settlements, it is inappropriate for the bulk of employment land to be concentrated in too small an area, and there needs to be thought given to other locations that are equally acceptable in environmental terms and might provide beneficial to growth aspirations.
- 5.5 Whilst the land is not physically connected to Lymm, the land is considered sustainable in employment terms. It is closely related to the settlement and will encourage patterns of travel that are more sustainable than longer-range commuting. A mixed-use form of development on the site could be designed to blend with and respect the local landscape and this could be achieved through a Development Brief.
- 5.6 Warrington Council has chosen the route of allocating large strategic sites to deliver housing and employment numbers, essentially creating new urban quarters and whole new villages within the borough. Majority of all allocated land has been released from the Green Belt; however, the Council has not clearly demonstrated how this land (particularly employment land in relation to this representation) will be enough for the next 20 years.
- 5.7 As identified, national Green Belt policy is restrictive and essentially, Green Belt is fixed and should never need to be developed. However, provision is made for change and the increased growth rates and targets that Local Authorities are facing has enabled this opportunity to review the Green Belts and provide a release of land to deliver the targets which cannot be done so on other brownfield sites in the borough.
- 5.8 It is good practice for Local Authorities to review their Green Belt during the process of preparing a new Local Plan, although with the recognition that this assessment should not be reviewed again until the end of the plan period. Therefore, providing enough land, not only for housing (although recognisably the largest target for land to be met nationally by government) but employment land is critical.
- 5.9 Warrington as a Local Authority is located within one of the key areas in the North West for employment opportunities and growth, a key element of the Northern Powerhouse, given the positioning of road, rail and shipping networks all provided in one authority. The Council

needs to reevaluate the need for employment land in those areas which do not have any existing or future employment allocations/ areas, such as Lymm.

- 5.10 My client's site is fully deliverable as a mixed-use allocation and land can be available immediately, with an already interested land promoter interested in the site.
- 5.11 Therefore, we request the land to be reassessed against Green Belt policy for the suitability of release to enable growth to the region and provide more than the minimum requirement of employment and residential land for the borough.
- 5.12 Warrington Council will not want to see the Local Plan as a failure and rather be a success, and the attractiveness and deliverability of sites is a key factor. At present, it is considered that the draft Local Plan is too rigid and perhaps bends too greatly in the direction of causing less controversy. It is apparent that tough decisions need to be made regarding the future of areas of Green Belt land in the Borough if its aspirations are to be realised.