

Warrington Borough Council
Planning Policy and Programmes
New Town House
Buttermarket Street
Warrington
Cheshire
WA1 2NH

28086/A3/CB/SG

27th September 2017

Dear Sirs

RE: WARRINGTON LOCAL PLAN REVIEW PREFERRED DEVELOPMENT OPTION REPRESENTATIONS ON BEHALF OF LANE END STRATEGIC LAND, LAND AT CARTRIDGE LANE, GRAPPENHALL

Introduction

This representation has been prepared by Barton Willmore, on behalf of Lane End Strategic Land, in response to the Preferred Development Option of the Warrington Local Plan Review ("Local Plan Review") and is submitted in relation to their land interest at Cartridge Lane, Grappenhall. A Site Location Plan showing the extent of this interest is provided alongside this representation.

The Local Plan Review is being prepared following the successful legal challenge to the Core Strategy housing requirement. The quashing of the housing requirement has left the Warrington development plan with no up-to-date housing requirement for the Borough, providing for an incomplete Local Plan and effectively a policy vacuum on housing needs. The adoption of a new housing requirement is therefore critical for the Borough, especially in facilitating the Council's ambition for Warrington to become a New City. As such, the efforts made by the Council to date to advance the Local Plan Review is welcomed by our Client.

The current Local Plan consultation provides the first opportunity to comment on the Council's proposed development strategy following the initial scoping exercise undertaken almost 12 months ago, and includes details of the Council's proposed housing requirement, strategic approach to development, and strategic areas of growth.

Housing Requirement

The Council has set out its intention to adopt a "policy-on" informed housing requirement for the Local Plan. The Council proposes to adopt a housing requirement of 1,113 dwellings per year (over 50% higher than that previously outlined within its Core Strategy), providing for a level of housing which said to be responsive to the LEP Growth Funding Devolution Bid scenario as modelled in the supporting Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). Our Client considers that this approach represents a positive move by the Council. The adoption of this housing requirement would:



- Provide for a level of housing which is above the identified demographic needs of the Borough taking into account the need for adjustment to national data sets on the basis of localised patterns in household size and formation, migration rates, second homes and vacancy;
- Allow the Council to meet its affordable housing need in full;
- Provide a response to evidence of a constrained housing market further to reported market signals which clearly shows pent up demand when contrasted to other local authorities within the wider Housing Market Area and the North West; and
- Provide sufficient housing in response to baseline projected economic growth.

Even so, the proposed housing requirement is evidenced as being insufficient to support a continuation of job creation which has been experienced within the Borough over the last 25 years. The failure to provide sufficient levels of housing in support of this job growth could lead to unsustainable travel patterns or a failure to maintain these levels of job growth. A Plan which would promote increased travel by car and/or see a lowering of the economic performance of the Borough would be contrary to the NPPF and in no doubt counter-productive to the New City status aims of the Council.

In our view, the evidence pushing for an elevated rate of delivery up and above that proposed by the Council illustrates the need for the Council to ensure that the housing requirement is adopted as a minimum and does not act as a ceiling to new development.

As well as supporting the continued economic prosperity of the Borough, this approach would also be consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF") which seeks to secure a significant boost in housing land supply. Capping development to the proposed level of 1,113 dwellings per year would not sit easily with this policy requirement of the Government. The housing requirement should therefore be expressed as "at least 1,113 dwellings per year".

Housing Delivery

In order to meet the housing requirement in full, the Council acknowledges the need for the release of land from the Green Belt. Our Client welcomes this decision, and believes that this action is necessary to secure the effectiveness of the Local Plan Review.

The Council has identified a shortfall in housing land of 6,831 dwellings, with this to be met on sites within the Green Belt. Having reviewed the evidence supporting the Council's appraisal of urban capacity, our Client believes that this could be higher and that the Council should plan accordingly for this.

The Council's assessed urban capacity includes a wide range of sources of supply including existing planning permissions, strategic locations for growth within the city centre and the waterfront, and windfall sites.

Examining existing planning consents first, it is notable that the Council assume that all sites benefiting from planning consent will be developed as intended. This is not the case in practice and as such a deduction should be made to this source of supply on account of local non-implementation rates.

Turning to windfalls, our Client is concerned the rate allowed for is too high and risks double counting. Windfall delivery is allowed for every year of the Plan moving forwards from 2017. However, this does not taken into account the possibility that windfall type sites may already been included within the supply as planning consents. To prevent the possibility of double counting, windfall delivery should be removed from the first 3 years taking into account the standard 3-year timeframe planning condition applied to sites with planning permission before they lapse. Beyond

this it would seem apparent that when examining the 10 year trend of windfall delivery, the data is heavily skewed by completions experienced in three of these years were significantly higher than typical for the Borough. Excluding these years would reduce the small-site allowance for the Borough significantly.

In terms of the strategic sites, there is an evident question mark over the deliverability of the Waterfront strategic allocation as currently envisaged by the Council owing to the apparent reliance on the construction of the proposed Western Link Road which would connect through the Site. To achieve the growth levels envisaged the Western Link Road would need to be developed in the short-term. However, at the time of writing there is no agreed route, funding or timescale for the delivery this Road. The result casts significant doubt over the potential of this Site to accommodate the level of housing identified by the Council during the Plan period (in its entirety), and as such increases the prospect of the need to identify alternative deliverable sites elsewhere within the Borough to make up for any potential none/under delivery.

Garden City Strategic Site

Our Client supports the identification of the Garden City Strategic Area of Growth for housing and employment uses.

The Garden City Suburb adjoins the Warrington Urban Area – acknowledged by the Council as the most sustainable and appropriate location in which to concentrate a large quantum of the future development needs of the Borough over the Plan period and beyond.

The Garden City Suburb provides the only location within the Borough on which to secure strategic levels of delivery of both housing and employment land, with the opportunity to create a sustainable and self-reliant but connected extension to the existing urban area of Warrington. The proposed allocation provides the opportunity to deliver the next strategic location of employment growth in Warrington building upon the success of Omega and Burtonwood, and will also provide for new infrastructure and service capacity ensuring minimal adverse effects for existing residents.

The allocation is consistent with Paragraph 52 of the NPPF which acknowledges the key role that strategic extensions and Garden Cities can provide in securing the delivery of housing needs, and Paragraph 158 of the NPPF which seeks to ensure that plan-makers ensure that the strategies for housing, employment and other land uses are integrated, reducing the need for travel by unsustainable modes of transportation.

The Garden City Suburb is shown within the supporting Green Belt Assessment to hold a weak contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt. The Garden City allocation is considered to be sound in this respect, and reflects the original New Town proposals for the extension of Warrington. The M56 and M6 provide significant, durable and definable boundaries for the Green Belt ensuring that the urban area does not extend beyond these. The M62 and M6 are noted to fulfil a similar role to the North of the Manchester Ship Canal and River Mersey in the town, and as such the allocation of this land as proposed by the Council will represent a continuation of this pattern of development reflecting how Warrington has grown over the past 50 years.

It is noted that the Council has already commenced its masterplanning for the Site taking into account the varying required land uses and facilities, broad constraints, and place making principles. Moving forward, our Client wishes to be actively engaged in this process, to ensure that the masterplan has been drawn up in accordance with a full appreciation of the constraints and opportunities of our Client's land, our Client's aspirations for their land, and that the land-use(s) identified through the masterplan are both available and deliverable within the Plan period.

The varying land uses, services and infrastructure identified as part of the masterplan raise the issue of the need for the Council to arrive at a mechanism to facilitate land equalisation agreements for landowners whom, through the masterplanning process, are required to "give over" their land for non-residential/commercial land uses which will likely be subject to a considerably reduced land value (compared to residential use). Again, this process should involve the active engagement of landowners and promoters with land interests in the Garden City Suburb.

With reference to our earlier comments in this representation, our Client considers that the Council's supporting evidence based suggests the need for a higher level of Green Belt release across Warrington. The Garden City Suburb provides for one opportunity for further land capacity than initially identified by the Council at this stage. It is noted that the concept masterplan for the Garden City Suburb currently includes large areas of green infrastructure which could be reduced without harm to residential amenity, ecology, or access to recreation, with new areas of open space potentially available within proposed areas of safeguarded land. The proposed District Centre could also provide for a mix of uses, including residential units, providing for additional capacity and providing for an active and vibrant new local centre.

The Garden City Suburb is the single largest area of growth identified within the Local Plan Review. Over the course of the Plan period, the site will be required to deliver over 7,000 dwellings. Of this, the majority is on currently designated Green Belt land, and as such, requires the adoption of this Local Plan Review to enable its delivery thus necessitating the need to secure the adoption of the Plan in the shorter term.

Given the scale of the development proposed by the Council for the Garden City Suburb, its delivery will be fundamental to the success of the Local Plan Review. As such, the Council will need to ensure that planning policies for the development of this site are relatively light touch and do not go beyond what is required to deliver a sustainable and integrated community. The Council should be open to negotiation of policy requirements, flexible to changes to the scheme which might depart somewhat from the initial masterplan, and avoid the application of a strict phasing regime across the site whereby one parcel is held back due to the non/under delivery of another for no good reason than to manage development.

Where developers/landowners fail to make their land available for the delivery of key infrastructure required to facilitate or unlock large sections of the Site for development, the Council should be prepared to utilise its powers to ensure that the delivery of the Garden City Site is not adversely affected and does not result in the failure to deliver the overall housing requirement of the Local Plan.

Our Client has land interests within the Garden City Suburb (as currently defined), at Cartridge Lane, Grappenhall. The Location Plan submitted alongside this representation illustrates the extent of this land. The Site extends to approximately 18.7ha and our Client is promoting this land primarily for housing use.

As currently drafted the masterplan shows that the Site would form part of the District Centre. Our Client would object to this identified use covering the entirety of the Site, but would be happy to consider the mixed use of the Site, comprising both district centre and residential land uses. As set out above this could be to the benefit of the usage of the district centre, creating an active centre leading to an enhanced sense of place. The inclusion of residential uses within the District Centre would also enhance the housing land supply position of the Council. Our Client is willing to enter into further discussions with the Council in relation to this issue.

The Site is not on its own examined through the Green Belt Assessment for its Green Belt function. Though is noted to form part of General Area 10 which is found as holding a weak contribution to the Green Belt. In our Client's view, when examining land west of the Broad Lane which makes up a large proportion of the Garden City Extension, this land should be examined as a whole rather than broken down into smaller parcels to give an accurate reflection of the role of this land within the Green Belt and in reflection of the need for this strategic site in the context of the identified shortfall in urban supply.

An initial walkover of the Site has been undertaken to understand the various habitats and likely ecological constraints of the Site. As a result of this assessment, any proposed development of the Site will retain existing trees and hedgerows as far as possible to minimise the potential for adverse impact on ecology. Further survey work in relation to Hedgerows, Badgers, Great Crested Newts, and Water Voles are suggested and will be undertaken in due course. The results of these will be used to define the capacity of the site for housing.

The Site is available for the development of housing now, and subject to its release from the Green Belt, is considered deliverable within the short to medium term.

Summary

In conclusion, our Client is supportive of the move by the Council to undertake a Local Plan Review and welcomes the opportunity provided by the current consultation to provide comments on the current approach of the Council.

Our Client considers that the identification of a policy-on housing requirement which will deliver housing in excess of the objectively assessed housing needs of the Borough, and provide for a significant boost in housing land in contrast to past trends of delivery, is positive and should be taken forward by the Council in future iterations of the Local Plan Review. The housing requirement should be expressed as a minimum to reflect the approach of the NPPF, and to maximise housing provision to ensure a continuation of job creation within the Borough.

Our Client welcomes the Council's acknowledgement of the need to review and release land from within the Green Belt to meet its proposed housing requirement. However, our Client is concerned that the actual shortfall in supply is larger than currently outlined by the Council and there will inevitably be a need for further releases from the Green Belt in order for the housing requirement to be delivered in full.

Our Client is supportive of the identification of the Garden City Suburb for housing and employment. The Site provides for a logical extension to the urban area, in an area which is contained by significant infrastructure, reducing substantially the significance of this land in maintaining the purposes of the Green Belt. The Site provides the opportunity to deliver a large proportion of the strategic development needs of the Borough in an integrated and sustainable manner, close to existing transport infrastructure, and well integrated to the existing urban area.

Our Client notes that whilst masterplanning this area of growth has already commenced, the specific land-uses and layout of the Site cannot be known or concluded upon without the active involvement of the various landowners and promoters with interest across the Site. This will require developer and landowner workshops with the Council, and regular active engagement. The failure to engage with these groups from the outset could mean that the delivery of the Site is subject to delay after delay. Similarly, the Council should also consider its approach to land equalisation.

To protect the deliverability of the Garden City Suburb, the Council should ensure that its planning policies within the Local Plan Review are not overly restrictive in their requirements. Detailed policy should be minimised as far as possible to avoid subjecting applicants to policy requirements which may increase costs unnecessarily or result in delay in determination. The Council should be flexible in its implementation of policy requirements and adopt a proactive and positive approach to ensure the timely delivery of the Site.

Our Client thanks the Council for providing the opportunity to make comments on the Preferred Approach Local Plan and looks forward to engaging with the Council in the future in relation to the ongoing preparation of the Local Plan, and the Garden City Suburb.

Yours sincerely



Encls. Land at Cartridge Lane, Grappenhall, Location Plan

