



Hearing Statement

Warrington Local Plan– Matter 6b: Main Development
Area: South East Warrington Urban Extension

on behalf of:

Mulbury Homes (Grappenhall) Ltd

**Land at Carr House Farm, Broad
Lane, Grappenhall**

July 2022

Prepared by

SATPLAN LTD,



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1. INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

Purpose

- 1.1 This Written Statement has been prepared by SATPLAN LTD in connection with the Examination in Public of the Warrington Local Plan (WLP) on behalf of Mulbury Homes (Grappenhall) Ltd (the promoter) and the landowners. Representations have been submitted at all stages of the Local Plan process and over time there has been significant dialogue between the Promoters, the Council and Homes England.
- 1.2 This statement specifically addresses the Inspectors Matter 6b (Main Development Area: South East Warrington Urban Extension) and the issue of 'Whether the South East Warrington Urban Extension Main Development Area (Policy MD2) is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.
- 1.3 This Statement also addresses the additional questions raised by the Inspector in relation to Matter 6b.

Context

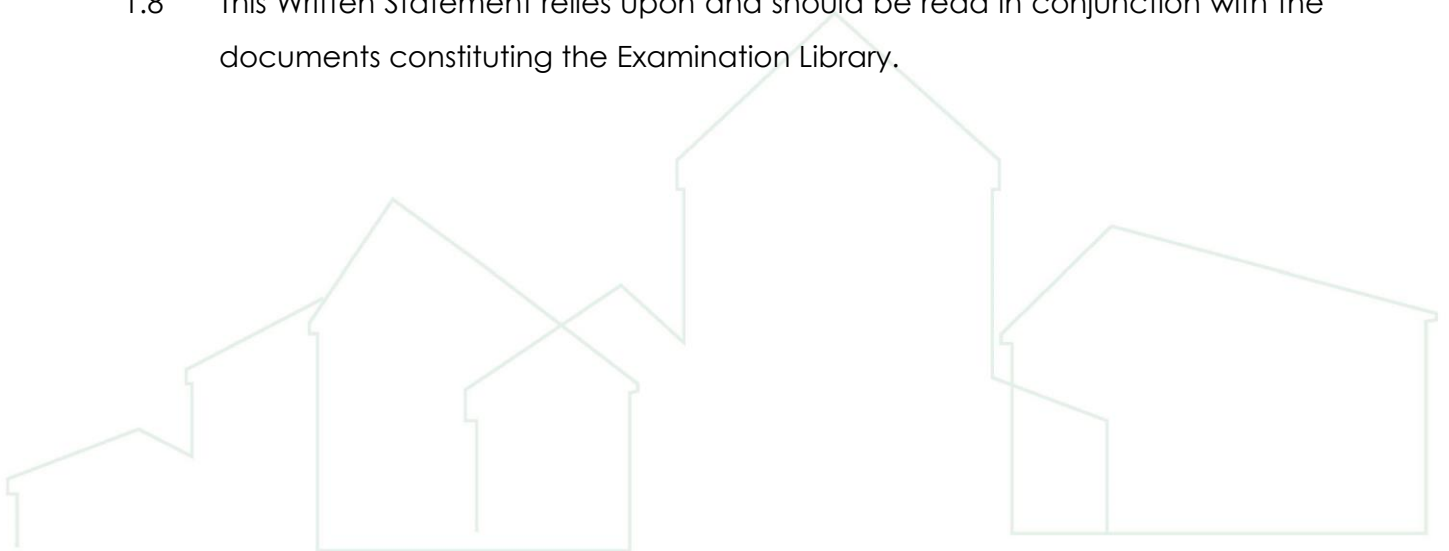
- 1.4 The context of this Statement concerns land adjacent to and surrounding Carr House Farm, Broad Lane, Grappenhall, Warrington a Site Location Plan is included at **Appendix 1**. The Site was previously identified within the Submission Version of the plan (2019) to provide most of the Country Park area within the urban extension. The submitted Plan has reduced the size of the Urban Extension significantly, excluding land at Carr House Farm (and other areas to the south and east). The proposed Allocation now follows the ownership of Homes England land only.
- 1.5 The Site is split into two parcels (referred to as the northern parcel and the southern parcel herein). The northern parcel extends to approximately 11.67

hectares (28.8 acres). It is currently comprised of two arable fields, with hedgerows and scattered hedgerow trees along the northern, southern, and western boundaries and to the eastern boundary is a block of woodland. The southern parcel extends to approximately 12.71 hectares (31.41 acres). It is currently comprised of two arable fields, with hedgerows along the boundaries.

- 1.6 Part of the wider Site is also in a commercial use for the growing and sale of Christmas Trees at Carr House farm.
- 1.7 The northern parcel adjoins Grappenhall Hall Residential School to the north. The school buildings are owned by Warrington Borough Council. The school has been closed for several years and whilst it has development potential, the Site is constrained by poor access. Currently the Site can only be accessed from Church Lane which is very narrow and congested. There is no alternative access point to the former school other than via Broad Lane and through the northern part of our Clients Site.

References

- 1.8 This Written Statement relies upon and should be read in conjunction with the documents constituting the Examination Library.



2. RESPONSE TO MATTER 6B- MAIN DEVELOPMENT AREA

Issue – Whether the South East Warrington Urban Extension Main Development Area (Policy MD2) is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Question 1 - What is the background to the Main Development Area and how was it identified?

2.1 No Response – For WBC to respond.

Question 2- What is the basis for the scale of development proposed and is this justified?

2.2. No Response – For WBC to respond.

Question 3 - What are the conclusions of the Green Belt Assessment in relation to the contribution of the land in question to the purposes of the Green Belt and the potential to alter the Green Belt in this location?

2.3. Our clients Site falls within the following parcels and their contribution is detailed below:

Parcel Reference	Parcel Contribution
WR39	Strong
GH3	Weak
GH4	Moderate

Land at Carr House Farm was concluded to contribute to the Green Belt as follows:

Site Reference	Site Contribution
R/18/047(North)	Moderate
R/18/047(South)	Moderate

2.4. We do not seek to reiterate or necessarily challenge the conclusions of the Green Belt assessment. On the contrary, we support the overall need for the assessment and the review of the Green Belt is integral to the Local Plan preparation process to identify areas where development can be accommodated without harming the fundamental aims of national Green Belt policy as set out in the NPPF. However, it is unclear how the findings of the Green Belt Study now relate to the revised (and reduced) urban extension, specifically with regard to the proposed artificial Green Belt Boundary that will need to be created – this matter is explored further below.

Defensible Boundary

2.5. Paragraph 143 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is clear that local authorities should “define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent”.

2.6. For the Plan to be found Sound, the proposed WGS allocation must be able to clearly define the new Green Belt boundaries so that they endure in the long term. As set out in previous representations, there is a need for the eastern boundary to be strengthened to create a new recognisable and permanent Green Belt.

2.7. In addition, having reviewed the Development Options and Site Assessment Technical Report (September 2021) and the Green Belt Site Selection – Implications of Green Belt Release- Arup 2021, the table on Page 8 asks the question as to whether a ‘new GB boundary would be defined using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent?’. The report states that “the remainder of the eastern boundary consists of sections of field boundaries and the south eastern boundary consists of a field boundary. These

would need to be strengthened to create a new recognisable and permanent GB boundary.'

2.8. We do not consider the justification or explanation provided conforms with Paragraph 145 of the NPPF. It is our view that Broad Lane provides a 'readily recognisable and permanent feature' within very close proximity and therefore the need to create a strengthen an '*artificial*' boundary along sections of fields is illogical and one can only surmise the chosen boundary is for ease in terms of including only that land, which is predominantly within single ownership, rather than following existing recognisable features.

2.9. Indeed, the northern part of Broad Lane is used as a logical boundary until the ownership of the land falls outside of Homes England ownership, at which point it is clear there is a requirement to create a new recognisable boundary. We would therefore further argue the proposed Green Belt boundary (across the WGS and not just the eastern boundary which is of significant to our client's land) is heavily and seemingly conveniently influenced by land ownership rather than policy direction intended within the NPPF. In our view this is a fundamental flaw of the Plan as currently drafted and goes to the heart of soundness **(with emphasis)**.

Question 4- What would be the effect of developing the site on the purposes of the Green Belt?

2.10. As detailed in question 3 above, the inclusion of our client's Site to the south of Broad Lane is entirely logical. The inclusion of this land would result in a clear and robust Green Belt boundary. This follows best practice when amending Green Belt boundaries and would protect the longevity of the Green Belt in this location – plainly a key requirement of NPPF when altering Green Belt boundaries.

2.11. **Question 5- Are there exceptional circumstances to alter the Green Belt in this particular case? If so, what are they?**

2.12. No Response – For WBC to respond.

Question 6- What is the approach towards Green Belt compensatory improvements? Is this sufficiently clear?

2.13. The previous Proposed Submission Version Local Plan (March 2019) included the proposal for a Country Park covering our client's land. The representations to the Publication Plan made by Pegasus Group on behalf of the Land Consortium include the merits and benefits of such a proposal continuing to be included along with other critical infrastructure within the updated proposed submission version of the plan.

2.14. There will clearly be an obligation for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in the coming months. Whilst at present this is not specifically included or referenced in the plan, as the recent Royal Assent of the Environment Act was only confirmed on 10th November 2021, as matters currently stand it is anticipated that consultation on the detailed regulations governing BNG will be carried out in 2022 with implementation of the BNG obligation from 2023. This is therefore a matter which will need to be considered through the Examination in Public process and options for the ability to deliver BNG across the borough require consideration as this matter will directly impact the quantum of housing that can be delivered from those Sites suggested for Allocation in this version of the Plan. In our view, the removal of the Country Park to the north of Broad Lane compromises the urban extension and is a lost opportunity to provide a significant level of BNG, and comprehensive connectivity to Grappenhall Wood (the location of Grappenhall Wood can be seen at **Appendix 1**) whilst providing a resource that would be of benefit to all residents in this area. This would also deliver on the Woodland Trusts previous plans in this locality whereby there would be continuous connectivity of woodland between

Grappenhall Village to Grappenhall Heys. It is understood the lack of funding prevented this from happening previously – this Plan and draft Allocation has the opportunity to deliver this long-term aim, however, as written the submitted Plan will not realise this.

2.15. In the case of our clients Site, the land to the north of Broad Lane was formerly allocated as the Country Park and therefore offers a realistic option to provide a significant area of BNG to 'offset' the development of the parcel of land to the south of Broad Lane for residential purposes. The removal of the southern parcel from the Green Belt would also ensure a defensible boundary is continued along Broad Lane and allow the parcel to the north to remain in the Green Belt as currently proposed within the submission plan. See **Appendix 2** for our suggested amendments to the Masterplan – this would provide for continued connectivity via the greenway network, providing good connections to Grappenhall Wood and the area identified in Appendix 2 – potential BNG to the north of Broad Lane. Whilst this land is outside of the ownership of Homes England, it is within single family ownership, the landowners are supportive of including their land within the Urban Extension for the uses proposed, subject to the equalisation of land values.

2.16. We consider the inclusion of our client's land within the proposed urban extension will not only provide a defensible Green Belt boundary (making use of existing features) it would also address the issue BNG and therefore compensatory improvements which is currently lacking in the submitted Plan.

2.17. **Question 7 What is the background to the specific policy requirements in Policy MD2.3? Are they justified and consistent with national policy? Do they provide clear and effective guidance on constraints and suitable mitigation?**

2.18. No Response – For WBC to respond.

Question 8- Does Policy MD2 identify all appropriate and necessary infrastructure requirements? How will these be provided and funded? Is this sufficiently clear?

- 2.19. Whilst Policy MD2 identifies a raft of infrastructure requirements, there is very little detail regarding the funding other than a slight reference to infrastructure costs being shared equally between the landowners within the Allocation. In our view this is not sufficiently clear as written and would suggest that a Main Modification will be required to this policy to add further detail.

Question 9- Are there potential adverse effects not covered above, if so, what are they and how would they be addressed and mitigated?

- 2.20. No Response – For WBC to respond.

Question 10- Is the development proposed viable and deliverable as anticipated within the plan period? What is the situation in relation to land ownership and developer interest?

- 2.21. We have previously highlighted the changes that have taken place (in terms of reducing the size of the Urban Extension). In our view, reducing the size of the Allocation poses a significant threat to the viability and deliverability of the Allocation (both within the Plan period and for that part of the development that would be delivered in the next plan period). Significant work was undertaken to support the previous (larger) proposed allocation both in terms of infrastructure requirements and the delivery of infrastructure. Critically, the previous allocation included a greater and more diverse range of landowners / developers that would have been able to significantly contribute towards infrastructure. By reducing the Allocation (for a significant part) to a single ownership, there is a very credible possibility of a mis-match between funding requirements and availability, which could jeopardise the delivery of the urban extension and therefore have significant implications for the wider Plan / Strategy.

Question 11-How is it intended to bring the site forward for development? What mechanisms will there be to ensure a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to development, ensuring that infrastructure requirements are provided?

- 2.22. Policy MD2 'side steps' this aspect by referring to the principal landowners and Developers preparing a Development Framework. This will be undertaken post adoption of the Local Plan and will include statutory and community consultation. This process alone could take a considerable period to complete. A Main Modification (or pause to the Hearings) is required to deal with this now as part of the Local Plan process rather than leaving such an important task to a later point in time, by leaving this critical framework to post adoption, questions the deliverability and therefore soundness of Policy MD2.

Question 12- Are any main modifications necessary for soundness?

- 2.23. We are of the firm view Policy MD2 as submitted is not sound. To make Policy MD2 sound, we consider the following Modifications to be necessary:

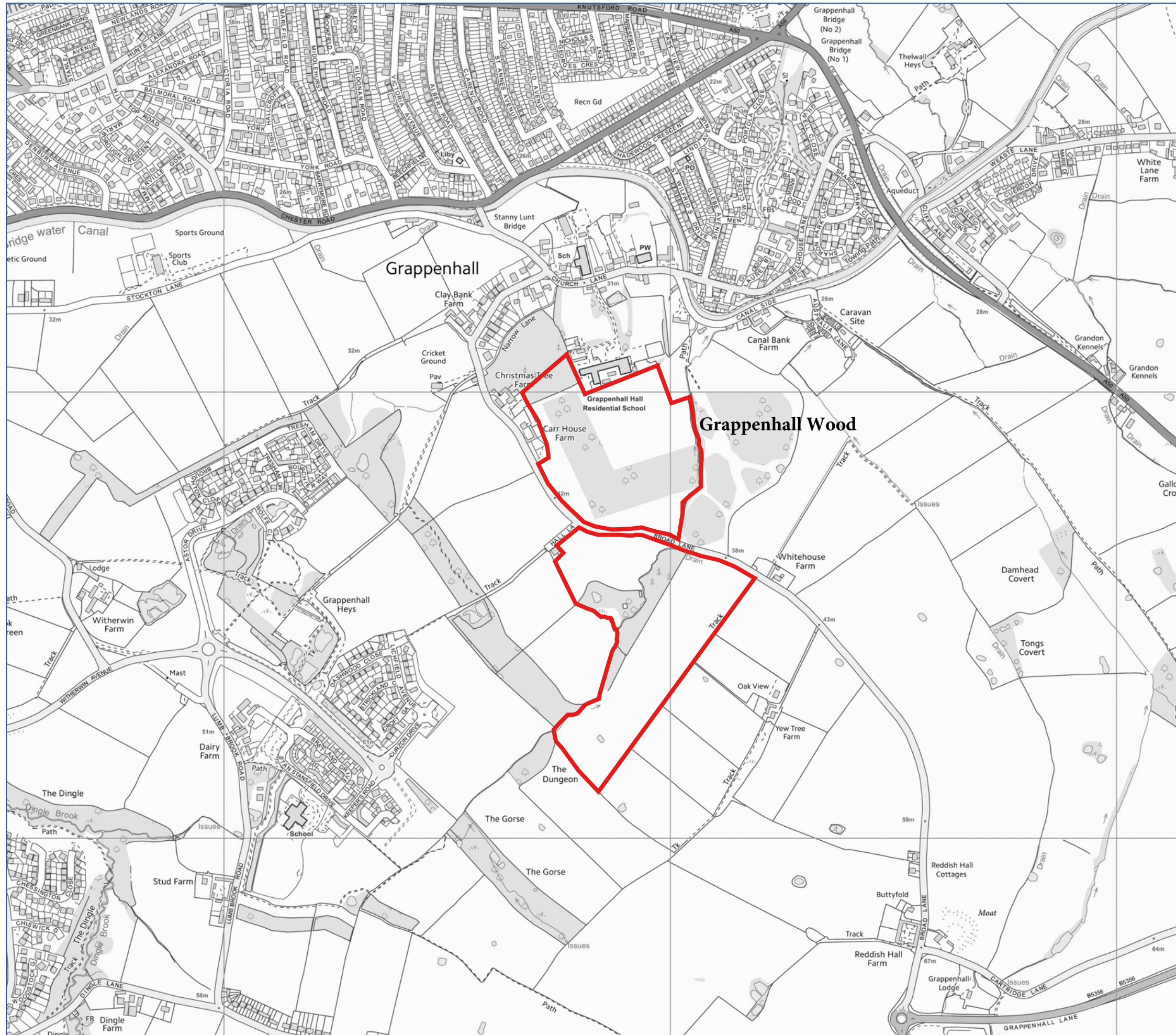
1. Redraw the Allocation boundary to include our Clients Site to the South of Broad Lane for a mix of housing and Green Infrastructure. The inclusion of this land provides a clear and robust Green Belt boundary without the need to create an artificial Green Belt Boundary (which is the current proposal).
2. Redraw the Allocation Boundary to include our clients land to the north of Broad Lane, this area to be used for BNG and to provide the linkages with Grappenhall Wood which will ensure a comprehensive greenway between Grappenhall Wood, Grappenhall Heys and beyond.
3. The Development Framework should form an integral part of the Plan rather than an item to be prepared post adoption. Any MM needs to

include significantly more detail regarding the delivery of the Urban Extension, otherwise there is a significant risk of this policy failing which will lead to speculative and unplanned development.



APPENDIX 1 - SITE LOCATION PLAN





 Site Boundary



Project Land at Broad Lane, Grappenhall.
 Drawing Title **Site Location Plan**
 Scale As Shown (Approximate)
 Drawing No. 10728/P07
 Date July 2017
 Checked DE/AL



APPENDIX 2- SUGGESTED ALTERATIONS TO THE SOUTH EAST WARRINGTON MASTERPLAN



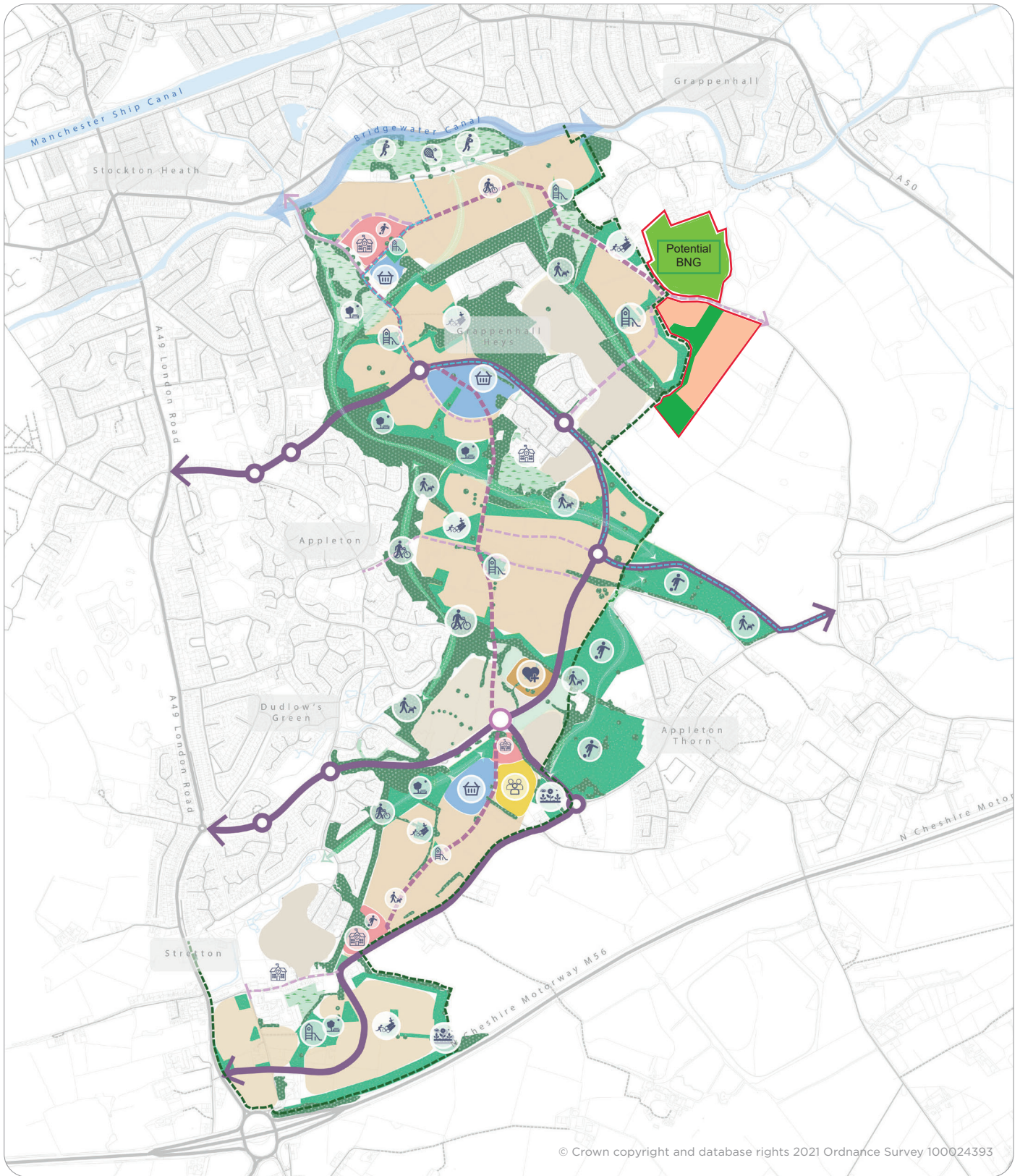


Figure 3. Indicative Masterplan Framework

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|--|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | Established Tree Groups | | Indicative Strategic Highway Network |
| | Existing Open Space | | Indicative Mass Transit Safeguarded Corridor |
| | Indicative Green Infrastructure | | Indicative Low Traffic Community Connector |
| | Indicative Residential Development | | Local Links |
| | Indicative Local Centres | | Green Links (to include active travel) |
| | Indicative Education | | Consented Development Schemes |
| | Indicative Healthcare | | Existing Connection Along Bridgewater Canal |
| | Indicative Community Hub | | Revised Green Belt Boundary |