

Warrington Local Plan Examination

Matters Statements

MATTER 7B – SITE ALLOCATION - CULCHETH

August 2022



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Issue

Whether the site allocation at Culcheth (Policy OS2) is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

(NB. Examination Library reference numbers are provided in brackets after each document referred to in the Matters Statement)

Questions

1. What is the background to the site allocation and how was it identified?

1.1 The assessment for the high level spatial distribution of options is outlined in Section 2 of the Development Options and Site Assessment Technical Report Sept 2021 (O1) and has been fully documented in response to Matter 3.

1.2 The site consists of two submission sites both of which were received as part of the Call for Sites for residential development SAP2 - in 2019. The larger site Land at Warrington Road (SHLAA Ref: 3157/Site Ref: R18/097/ Site Ref; R18/P2 /069 pages 432 to 434) is 8.4ha gross. The smaller site Lions Den (SHLAA Ref; 3337/ Site Ref; R18/P2/064 pages 435 to 437) consists of 0.4ha. Section 3 of the Development Options and Site Assessment Technical Report Sept 2021 (O1) outlines the process for how each settlement site was identified. The site assessment process concluded that:

The site is considered to be suitable and unlikely to have a major impact on trends. The site is considered to be achievable and is an area of moderate viability with known demand and no known abnormal development costs. The site is available as it is being promoted by the owner and is not in active use. The site is adjacent to the settlement of Culcheth being located to the east of the settlement on Warrington Road. The site is considered to be in a sustainable location and is free from ownership issues. There are no known abnormal development costs and the site is in a location of moderate viability. An appropriate vehicular access to Warrington Road (A574) can be achievable within the site edged red with the opportunity to moderate vehicle speeds along Warrington Road and a pedestrian footway could be provided along the site frontage to link into the existing footway network, to improve pedestrian linkage to the local centre. As such, the site would be in accordance with the objectives set out in the draft Warrington Local Plan including objective W1 to strengthen existing neighbourhoods, W2 to facilitate the sensitive release of Green Belt, W4 to promote sustainable modes of transport, and W6 to minimise the impact of development on the environment. It is recommended that the site is brought forward in conjunction with Site Ref: R18/P2/064 and a durable Green Belt boundary would need to be created.

2. 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?

- 2.1 The two sites were assessed in the Green Belt Site Selection – Implications for Green Belt Release - August 2021 Report (GB3) as making a weak contribution to Green Belt purposes.
- 2.2 The assessment concluded that development of the site would entail a small incursion into undeveloped countryside, the removal of the site from the Green Belt alongside the adjacent site (SHLAA Ref: 3337 / Site Ref: R18/P2/064) will not harm the overall function and integrity of the Green Belt around Culcheth. A new recognisable and permanent Green Belt boundary would be created by strengthening the existing boundaries.

3. What would be the effect of developing the site on the purposes of the Green Belt?

- 3.1 The Green Belt Site Selection – Implications for Green Belt Release - August 2021 Report (GB3) concluded that the site currently makes a weak contribution to Green Belt purposes. Whilst development would entail a small incursion into undeveloped countryside, the removal of the whole area from the Green Belt will not harm the overall function and integrity of the Green Belt around Culcheth. A new recognisable and permanent Green Belt boundary would be created by strengthening the existing boundaries.
- 3.2 Full details of the effect of developing the site on the five purposes of the Green Belt are detailed in the Green Belt Site Selection – Implications of Green Belt Release 2021 (GB3) document.

4. Are there exceptional circumstances to alter the Green Belt in this particular case? If so, what are they?

- 4.1 This allocation site will increase housing choice, provide affordable housing and support the vitality and viability of local services in Culcheth. The green field and relatively unconstrained nature of the land will enable the site to be delivered in the early period of the Plan meeting identified housing needs in the shorter term.
- 4.2 This allocation also forms part of a wider spatial strategy that will ensure that sufficient land is provided to meet Warrington's development needs, that housing affordability is addressed and new sustainable communities are created, in a manner that will support the delivery of strategic infrastructure that will also unlock major brownfield development sites.
- 4.3 These are considered to constitute 'Exceptional Circumstances'.
- 4.4 It should be noted that the Green Belt boundary has been amended in this location to allow for the site allocation and also to address any anomalies that the site allocation would otherwise create. In this instance the Green Belt boundary has been amended so that two residential properties on the corner of Holcroft Lane /

Warrington Road (Lion's Den and Little Lions Cottage) are also removed from the Green Belt. The exceptional circumstances for this change are those put forward in respect of the allocated site and the purpose of this further amendment is to secure a defensible boundary for the settlement of Culcheth.

5. What is the basis for the scale of development proposed and is this justified?

5.1 The Council considers that the scale of housing growth is consistent with the Plan's Spatial Strategy of 'incremental growth' in each of the outlying settlements. The outlying settlements were reconsidered in the Development Options Report 2021 (O1) with consideration given to suitability, and achievability of development of the site. The broader sustainability factors as set out in the Council's Sustainability Appraisal SA Report August 2021(SP3) were also assessed including Green Belt issues, flooding, natural environment and local facilities.

6. What is the background to the specific requirements of Policy OS2? Are they justified and consistent with national policy? Do they provide clear and effective guidance on constraints and suitable mitigation?

6.1 The specific policy requirements either relate to the Local Plan objectives including the type and tenure of homes to be delivered, or to ensure appropriate mitigation in bringing the site forward for development and addressing site constraints. The requirements have been established taking into account the Council's evidence base and site assessment work, engagement with the principal landowner and feedback from previous rounds of consultation. The Council considers the requirements are clear, justified and consistent with national policy.

6.2 The policy provides clear guidance on what the Council expects will be delivered as part of the development including any special considerations concerning Green Belt, climate change and the natural environment.

7. Does the policy identify appropriate and necessary infrastructure requirements? How will these be provided and funded? Is this sufficiently clear?

7.1 The Council considers that the level of development proposed in the outlying settlements, including that proposed in Culcheth, can be accommodated by existing infrastructure provision, with some limited infrastructure enhancements.

7.2 The development will be expected to make a contribution towards primary and secondary school provision and to additional primary care capacity. There is also a requirement for a contribution to be made to expanding and enhancing existing or planned built leisure facilities and playing pitches. The planning of the additional facilities will be undertaken by the Council in collaboration with relevant providers and will be programmed to meet needs as they arise and increase.

8. Is the requirement for Green Belt compensatory improvements justified and appropriate?

- 8.1 Paragraph 142 of the NPPF requires that where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, local authorities should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land.
- 8.2 The Council acknowledges that the approach to Compensatory Green Belt improvements could be clearer in the Policy. As such the Council is proposing a modification to clarify that in the first instance improvements should be made in the immediate vicinity of the site and delivered by the developer. The Council will then consider improvements in the wider area where it can be demonstrated that the improvements cannot be delivered in the immediate vicinity of the site or where this will provide greater benefits. Financial contributions will only be considered where this would help to ensure that the benefits of compensatory improvements can be maximised by providing them in a more appropriate location.
- 8.3 The proposed wording for the modification is detailed at paragraph 14.1.
- 9. Is the Council satisfied that safe access to the site can be secured, and that Culcheth has the appropriate transport infrastructure required to support the development?**
- 9.1 The Council has established infrastructure requirements for the allocation and associated costs through ongoing engagement with infrastructure providers (United Utilities, CCG/NHS); internal Council services; and partner services. This provision is considered necessary to mitigate any impacts of the development.
- 9.2 Through the site assessment process, the Council's Highways Officers confirmed that appropriate vehicular access can be provided to the site and that the level of development proposed in Culcheth can be supported. The Highways Officers indicated that the smaller site (see Q11 below for ownership details), if developed separately, will require a footway along the site frontage and development may be better in tandem with the adjoining site. Both sites are subject to Parts 14 and 15 of the policy which require a Transport Assessment and associated package of transport improvement measures to support the development.
- 10. Are there potential adverse effects not covered above, if so, what are they and how would they be addressed and mitigated? N.B. The Council's response should address key issues raised in representations.**
- 10.1 **The issue was raised that the additional traffic resulting from the development would result in more air pollution.** The Local Plan Air Quality Modelling Report undertaken for the previous PSVLP (2019) concluded that the burden of poor air quality on people's health is expected to reduce in Warrington considerably in the future, as emissions are reduced, largely due to improvements in vehicle emissions outweighing increases in the number of vehicle journeys. However, the Report highlights the health threat posed by particulate matter. As such the Council is

committed to implementing the actions of its Air Quality Action Plan, to ensure that opportunities to improve air quality are fully realised. Additionally, the allocation policy includes a range of measures to promote active transport, including walking and cycling, and improve public transport serving the allocation and surrounding area. Together these measures will have a positive impact on air quality.

- 10.2 **It was raised that the development does not meet the needs of the area.** The development will provide a range of housing tenures, types and sizes in order to ensure development contributes to meeting the Borough's general and specialist housing needs, including family homes with gardens, specific provision for older people and for younger people looking to purchase their first home. 30% of homes will be affordable.
- 10.3 **It was raised that the Council has not taken into account the development of HS2 and how this will impact on the local road network.** The Council has taken into account the latest proposals for HS2 in all of its site assessments.
- 10.4 **Cheshire Wildlife Trust stated that all areas of priority habitats should be excluded from the allocations in order to avoid harm to biodiversity.** Part 10 of the Policy provides protection for any existing habitats on the site, whilst Part 11 of the Policy requires the development to provide net biodiversity gain.
- 10.5 **Cheshire Constabulary requests the addition of text under community facilities of 'Appropriate emergency services infrastructure'.** The Council will engage with the Cheshire Constabulary to consider their future needs but there is no evidence to demonstrate that any specific provision needs to be made as part of this allocation.
- 10.6 **National Grid would like an amendment to the policy that requires that a strategy for responding to their overhead transmission lines present on the site which demonstrates how which demonstrates how the National Grid Design Guide and Principles have been applied at the masterplanning stage and how the impact of the assets has been reduced through good design.** The policy is already comprehensive and the Council considers that this additional text is not necessary. Specific detail on power infrastructure is provided in INF3.
- 11. Is the development proposed viable and deliverable within the period envisaged, noting that it is anticipated that first homes would be completed in 2024/5?**
- 11.1 The site is in two ownerships. The majority of the site is under option to Story homes for residential development. The smaller site is in single private ownership. Story Homes is committed to progressing a scheme as soon as the site is allocated. The other private landowner is keen to facilitate a scheme separately. Conversations have been held between the representatives of both sites to ensure the allocation can come forward as a whole in accordance with the Policy.
- 11.2 The site is green field and the relatively unconstrained nature of the land will enable the site to be delivered in the early part of the Plan period. The Local Plan Viability

Assessment August (V2) confirms that the site can provide all infrastructure in line with the policy requirements.

12. What is the situation in relation to land ownership and developer interest?

12.1 As detailed above each site was promoted by the owner and there are no known ownership issues. The larger site is optioned to Story Homes.

13. 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?

13.1 The policy sets out all the requirements for the comprehensive development of the site. This includes on-site requirements and contributions to offsite infrastructure improvements including community facilities; open space and recreation; transport and accessibility; and utilities.

13.2 In their written representation UPSVLP 1418 the developer of the larger site confirmed that they are committed to the comprehensive delivery of the site. The owner of the smaller site did not submit a formal representation to the Updated PVLP Regulation 19 consultation but has since confirmed they still want to bring their part of the allocation forward for development.

14. Are any main modifications necessary for soundness?

14.1 The Council acknowledges that the approach to Compensatory Green Belt improvements could be clearer within the Policy. As such the Council is proposing the following modification:

A scheme of compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of land remaining in the Green Belt will be required. **In the first instance, the improvements should be made in the immediate vicinity of the site and delivered by the developer. The Council will consider improvements in the wider area where it can be demonstrated that the improvements cannot be delivered in the immediate vicinity of the site or where this will provide greater benefits.** Financial contributions will **only** be considered where this would help to ensure that the benefits of compensatory improvements can be maximised by providing them in ~~the most~~ **a more** appropriate location.

14.2 As a result of concerns expressed by Natural England regarding the potential in-combination impact of the Local Plan on Holcroft Moss within the Manchester Mosses Special Area of Conservation, the Council is currently working with Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) on potential mitigation measures for the moss. The Council is therefore proposing a modification to the Plan, and specifically a modification to Part 19 of Policy OS2, which will require a project level HRA to be undertaken and, if required, provide a financial contribution towards appropriate mitigation measures. The mechanism for establishing any required contribution from individual developments and how this will be used to undertake the mitigation

could then be set out in an SPD and therefore an addition to the supporting text will need to be made referring to this.