

EiP Statement

Warrington Updated Proposed Submission Version Local Plan 2021-2038 (September 2021) Story Homes – Representor ID UPSVLP 1418

Our ref 42154/07/RCA/BOC

Date August 2022

Subject Matter 7b: Site Allocation - Culcheth

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Lichfields is instructed by Story Homes [Story] to make representations on its behalf to the Warrington Updated Proposed Submission Version Local Plan 2021-2038 (September 2021) [WUPSVLP].
- 1.2 This Statement has been prepared in response to the Matters, Issues and Questions raised by the Inspector for the Matter 7b Examination in Public [EiP] hearing sessions, relating to the outlying settlement site allocation at Culcheth.
- 1.3 Separate Statements have also been submitted in respect of the following Matters:
- 1 Matter 3 – The Spatial Strategy
 - 2 Matter 11 – Transport and other Infrastructure
 - 3 Matter 13 – Other Policies
 - 4 Matter 14 – Monitoring and Review
- 1.4 This Statement expands upon Story’s previous representations made on the WUPSVLP and focuses on the Inspector’s specific issues and questions. Story is also part of a Development Consortium in Warrington (Representor ID UPSVLP 0410) that has responded collectively to Matters 3, 4, 6a, 6c and 8. Where relevant, the comments made are assessed against the tests of soundness established by the National Planning Policy Framework [the NPPF] and the National Planning Practice Guidance [Practice Guidance].
- 1.5 This Statement has been drafted in the context of Story’s land assets in Warrington, which includes the site at Warrington Road, Culcheth, a proposed allocation for residential development (Policy OS2 – Culcheth). Alongside the land at Warrington Road, Culcheth, Story is also promoting additional land at Runcorn Road, Higher Walton (the SWUE) which is capable of coming forward to meet the requirement for new homes in the Borough.

2.0 Questions

Q1: What is the background to the site allocation and how was it identified?

- 2.1 The proposed Land to the East of Culcheth allocation comprises two parcels of land that were promoted as part of the 2019 Call for Sites exercise:
- 1 Land at Warrington Road – Promoted by Story (SHLAA ref. 3157); and,
 - 2 Land at Lion’s Den – Promoted by the landowner (SHLAA ref. 3337).
- 2.2 Story has been promoting the Land at Warrington Road (SHLAA ref. 3157), which makes up the majority of the Culcheth allocation. The allocation was identified through a site selection methodology undertaken in line with the Council’s preferred spatial strategy of ‘incremental growth’ in outlying settlements. An explanation of the Council’s site selection methodology is set out in its 2021 Development Options and Site Assessment Technical Report¹ [DOSATR].
- 2.3 The 2021 DOSATR concludes the following for the parcel of land being promoted by Story (SHLAA ref: 3337)²:
- “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, having been promoted by the site owner. 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.”*
- 2.4 On this basis, the 2021 DOSATR concludes that the site should be included as an allocation for new homes.
- 2.5 The 2021 DOSATR concludes the following for the parcel of land at Lion’s Den (SHLAA ref. 3337), which is being promoted by the landowner:

¹ Warrington Borough Council – Development Options and Site Assessment Report (September 2021) – Chapter 3

² Warrington Borough Council – Development Options and Site Assessment Report (September 2021) – Appendix 3

“Whilst the site is not directly adjacent to the settlement of Culcheth, it is adjacent to existing development in the Green Belt which is adjacent to the settlement. The site should be considered alongside SHLAA Ref: 3157 / Site Ref: R18/P2/069. Considering both sites together, the site is considered to be in a sustainable location and is free from ownership issues, having been promoted by the site owner. There are no known abnormal development costs and the site is in a location of moderate viability. 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 SHLAA Ref: 3157 / Site Ref: R18/P2/069 and a durable Green Belt boundary would need to be created.”

- 2.6 On this basis, the 2021 DOSATR recommends that the Land at Lion’s Den is allocated in conjunction with the Land at Warrington Road (SHLAA ref. 3157) as a comprehensive allocation.

Q2: 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?

- 2.7 The land being promoted by Story (SHLAA ref. 3157) was considered to make a ‘weak’ contribution to the Green Belt purposes in the 2016 Green Belt Assessment³. The 2021 Green Belt Site Selection Implications of Green Belt Release⁴ also states that the parcel makes a ‘weak’ overall contribution to the Green Belt purposes. Story agrees with this assessment and supports the removal of the site from the Green Belt.

- 2.8 The Land at Lion’s Den (SHLAA ref. 3337) is considered in the 2021 Green Belt Site Selection Implications of Green Belt Release Report to make a ‘moderate’ contribution to Green Belt purposes. However, when considered alongside Story’s site (SHLAA ref. 3157), development of this parcel is not considered to harm the overall function and integrity of the Green Belt. A new recognisable and permanent Green Belt boundary would be created by strengthening the existing boundaries.

Q3: What would be the effect of developing the site on the purposes of the Green Belt?

- 2.9 The Green Belt Site Selection Implications of Green Belt Release concludes⁵:

“Whilst 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 Warrington Borough Council – Green Belt Assessment (2016)

⁴ Warrington Borough Council – Green Belt Site Selection Implications of Green Belt Release (August 2021)

⁵ Warrington Borough Council – Green Belt Site Selection Implications of Green Belt Release (August 2021) – p.18

2.10 Story agrees with these conclusions. Development of the site will not harm the overall function and integrity of the Green Belt around Culcheth.

Q4: Are there exceptional circumstances to alter the Green Belt in this particular case? If so, what are they?

2.11 Yes. Story agrees that an exceptional circumstances case has been demonstrated for the release of Green Belt land around the outlying settlements, including Culcheth. The WUPSVLP [§3.4.1 to §3.4.16] sets out the exceptional circumstances sought by the NPPF [§140] to justify the release of Green Belt land. This includes a demonstration of the exceptional circumstances for each area, including the outlying settlements, the purpose of which is to increase housing choice and support the vitality and viability of local services. The allocation will facilitate the delivery of affordable housing and help to deliver a sustainable community in Culcheth.

Q5: What is the basis for the scale of development proposed and is this justified?

2.12 Policy OS2 allocates Land to the east of Culcheth for a minimum of 200 homes. Part 5 of emerging Policy OS2 states that the development should be constructed to an average minimum density of 30 dwellings per hectare [dph] to reflect the site's location adjacent to the open countryside.

2.13 The 2021 SHLAA assessment⁶ considered a capacity of 192 dwellings for the parcel of land being promoted by Story (SHLAA ref: 3157). This is a net development density of 30.4 dph.

2.14 The Land at Lion's Den (SHLAA ref. 3337) is included as part of the proposed Policy OS2 allocation to maximise the development potential of the land removed from the Green Belt. This 2021 SHLAA assessment⁷ of the site sets out that it has capacity of 11 dwellings at a net development density of 26.8 dpa.

2.15 Story considers that flexibility should be provided in the policy to deliver increased minimum densities in appropriate areas of the site such as the central area. Otherwise, Part 5 of Policy OS2 could result in the inefficient use of land by unnecessarily applying lower density requirements where higher density development would be appropriate. The current approach does not align with the objectives of the NPPF [§124], which seeks to promote the efficient use of land with development at high densities where appropriate.

Q6: 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?

2.16 Part 4 of Policy OS2 requires specific provision to be made for self- build/custom build plots, subject to local demand as demonstrated by the Council's self-build register. Story notes that the landowners of the Land at Lion's Den intend to bring their parcel of land forward as self and custom build plots, which would fulfil the requirement of Part 4 of the policy. However, to ensure flexibility, Part 4 of the policy should be deleted. The Council already has a legal

⁶ Warrington Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2021) – Appendix 2

⁷ Warrington Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2021) – Appendix 2

obligation to grant sufficient planning permissions to meet the demand for self-build and custom housebuilding. As local demand for such plots across the Borough is unknown, the Council cannot rely on this allocation as a source of supply. We note that the Council's commitment to delivering of self-build plots is set out in Policy DEV2, so there would still be a mechanism in place for the Council to secure self and custom build plots if the requirement is removed from Policy OS2. Story considers that self and custom build plots should be delivered in locations where there is a clear market demand.

- 2.17 Story considers that Part 8 and 9 of this policy (in relation to open space and recreation) do not accord with national policy as they are currently worded. The need for open space provision, leisure facilities and playing pitch provision needs to be demonstrated through the appropriate evidence, including an assessment of existing provision. We have therefore suggested an amendment in our response to Question 14 below to ensure soundness.
- 2.18 Part 15 of the policy states that the development will be required to contribute towards the delivery of sustainable transport modes. Story notes that the site is already well served by existing bus routes, which provide access to Warrington town centre and local employment opportunities as Birchwood. The site is also located within walking distance of Culcheth Community Primary School Culcheth High School, as well as a range of shops, services, and facilities in Culcheth. Therefore, the allocation of this site will encourage walking and cycling through the provision of pedestrian and cycle routes. Should the Council require contributions towards the delivery of sustainable transport modes, Story would expect the Council to demonstrate a clear need.
- 2.19 Part 19 of the policy requires development to mitigate air quality impacts on the Manchester Mosses SAC in accordance with Policy ENV8 (Part 4). Part 4 of Policy ENV8 states that any proposals that would result in increased traffic flows on the M62 past the Manchester Mosses SAC of more than 100 vehicles per day or 20 Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) per day must devise a scheme-specific range of measures to reduce reliance on cars, reduce trip generation and promote ultra-low emission vehicles. Story considers that this requirement is unjustified as no clear explanation for the vehicle and HGV thresholds identified and they appear to be arbitrary figures. A key aim of the plan is to create sustainable developments and therefore many of the policy requirements will already be built-in to development proposals for example the inclusion of electric charging points.
- 2.20 Following comments raised by Natural England, the Council has proposed a modification to Part 19 of the policy, which will require a project level Habitat Regulation Assessment to be prepared. Story considers this requirement to be excessive when considered alongside all the other ecology and air quality technical work which has been undertaken; or will be undertaken as part of the planning application stage.
- 2.21 In its Written Statement to Matter 13⁸, Story concluded that Policy EN7 should be amended to ensure that it meets the tests of soundness. As Part 21 of Policy OS 2 requires development to accord with Policy ENV7, it must be deleted from requirements of this policy unless Policy ENV7 is updated to reflect Story's suggested modification.

⁸ Story Homes – Written Statement to Matter 13 – Other Policies (August 2022)

Q7: Does the policy identify appropriate and necessary infrastructure requirements? How will these be provided and funded? Is this sufficiently clear?

- 2.22 Story has some concerns over the clarity of Part 7 of the Policy OS2, which states that development will be required to contribute towards the provision of additional primary care capacity. However, there is no clarification in the policy or the explanatory text as to why such a contribution is required and no evidence is presented to justify the requirement.

Q8: Is the requirement for Green Belt compensatory improvements justified and appropriate?

- 2.23 The scope for the compensatory improvements will be agreed through further engagement with the Council at Examination and planning application stage. The Practice Guidance⁹ allows for compensatory improvements to be secured through appropriate use of a condition or s106 agreement.

- 2.24 The Practice Guidance¹⁰ also states that Green Belt compensatory improvements can include improved access to new, enhanced, or existing recreational and playing field provision. Therefore, Story will work with the Council to explore opportunities for compensatory measures.

Q9: 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?

- 2.25 Story instructed Croft Transport Solutions to undertake a detailed appraisal of the highways network and access options. This demonstrated that vehicular access to the allocation can be achieved both off Warrington Road and from Holcroft Lane and there are no particular capacity constraints to the local highway network which would provide an issue for this additional traffic generation. This will be demonstrated in detail within a Transport Assessment that would accompany any future planning application on the proposed allocation. There will be no negative highways impacts in relation to the operation of the schools to the north.

Q10: Are there potential adverse effects not covered above, if so, what are they and how would they be addressed and mitigated?

- 2.26 No. The site is not recognised for its biodiversity value and does not support any priority habitats. It is not subject to any ecological designations, such as SSSI's, SBI's or Local Nature Reserves, and there are no such designations nearby.

Q11: Is the development proposed viable and deliverable within the period envisaged, noting that it is anticipated that first homes would be completed in 2024/25?

- 2.27 Yes, there are no legal or ownership constraints to the delivery of housing on the site. The site is available for the delivery of housing now, it offers a suitable location for housing and Story is committed to progressing a scheme as soon as the site is allocated.

⁹ Planning Practice Guidance Reference ID: 64-003-20190722

¹⁰ Planning Practice Reference ID: 64-002-20190722

2.28 Story is working collaboratively, and has an open channel of dialogue, with the neighbouring landowners. However, as noted in our response to Question 6 above, the owners of Land at Lion's Den wish to bring their portion of the site forward as self and custom build plots.

2.29 The site is fully deliverable.

Q12: What is the situation in relation to land ownership and developer interest?

2.30 The land being promoted by Story is within single ownership and Story have an agreement with the landowner to bring forward the site for residential development.

2.31 As set out above, the small northern parcel of the allocation (Land at Lion's Den) will be brought forward by the landowner for self and custom build plots (who are also party to the Statement of Common Ground).

Q13: 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?

2.32 Story controls the vast majority of the allocation and will submit a planning application at the earliest opportunity upon adoption of the WUPSVLP. Story submitted an indicative masterplan with its representations to the WUPSVLP consultation which demonstrates that all of the allocation can be delivered as a comprehensive scheme.

Q14: Are any main modifications necessary for soundness?

2.33 Story advises that the following modifications should be made to Policy OS2 before adoption of the WUPSVLP:

- 1 Although the landowners of the Land at Lion's Den are intending to bring their portion of the allocation forward as self and custom build plots, the requirement in Part 4 of the policy should be deleted to ensure flexibility.
- 2 Part 5 of the policy should be re-worded so that provision is made to deliver increased densities in appropriate areas of the site (e.g. in the central area). A suggested modification to Part 5 of the policy is as follows:

*"To reflect the site's location adjacent to the open countryside the development will be constructed to a ~~average~~ minimum density of 30dph. **Increased development densities will be appropriate in areas of the site that are not directly adjacent to the open countryside.**"*

- 3 Clarification in the policy or the explanatory text is required as to why a contribution towards primary care is required (including relevant evidence to justify it). If this evidence cannot be provided Part 7 of the Policy should be deleted.
- 4 the following text should be added to the end of Parts 8 and 9:

“...where assessment of existing provision demonstrates that existing facilities have insufficient capacity to serve the increase in population arising from the development”.

- 5 Evidence of need for a contribution towards the delivery of sustainable transport modes should be provided otherwise the Council should delete Part 15 of the policy.
- 6 Part 19 of the policy should be deleted unless the Council can provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate how this requirement has been derived and why it is justified.
- 7 Part 21 of the policy should be deleted unless Policy ENV7 is updated to reflect Story’s suggested modifications.