

Warrington Local Plan Examination

Matters Statements

MATTER 7C – SITE ALLOCATION – HOLLINS GREEN



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Issue

Whether the site allocation at Hollins Green (Policy OS3) 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 This site was submitted as part of the Call for Sites as a site for residential development (SAP2 - Pages 460 to 462) in 2019. 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:
- 1.3 The site is adjacent to the settlement of Hollins Green and is considered to be in a sustainable location. It is considered to be suitable for development. The site is considered to be available as it is free from ownership issues, having been promoted by the site owner. The site is considered to be achievable as it is in a location of moderate viability and there is developer interest/demand and no known abnormal development costs. Development of 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 land, W4 to promote sustainable modes of transport, and W6 to minimise the impact of development on the environment.

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 site was assessed in the Green Belt Site Selection – Implications for Green Belt Release - August 2021 Report (GB3) as having a moderate contribution to Green Belt purposes.
- 2.2 The assessment concluded that 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 (Site Ref: R18/056 / Site Ref: R18/P2/146C) will not harm the overall function and integrity of the Green Belt around Hollins Green. A new recognisable and permanent Green Belt boundary would be created consisting of the A57 Manchester Road and through strengthening the other 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 moderate contribution to Green Belt purposes. 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 (Site Ref: R18/056 / Site Ref: R18/P2/146C) will not harm the overall function and integrity of the Green Belt around Hollins Green. A new recognisable and permanent Green Belt boundary would be created consisting of the A57 Manchester Road and through strengthening the other 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 Hollins Green. 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 the Plan's 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 dwellings on Marsh Brook Close to the north west of the allocated site 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 Hollins Green.

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 OS3? 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 landowners 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 Hollins Green, 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 Hollins Green has the appropriate transport infrastructure required to support the development?**
- 9.1 Through the site assessment process, the Council's Highways Officers confirmed that appropriate vehicular and pedestrian access can be provided to the site and that the level of development proposed in Hollins Green can be supported. This is 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.
- 9.2 Point 14 and 15 of the policy states clearly the accessibility requirements for any development coming forward.
- 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 **There has been concern that development will impact value of property and ruin landscape of area.** The Council considers that the allocations proposed in the outlying settlements, including in Hollins Green, are of a relatively limited scale which together with the safeguards in the allocation policies will mean that they will not impact on their respective characters.
- 10.2 **It was raised that the development will increase flood risk in the area.** The Updated PSVLP 2021 (SP1) reflects the revised Environment Agency Flood Mapping issued in 2021 within the Additional Site Assessment Proformas 2021 document (SAP1). This is supported by a Level 1 & Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) taking into account all sources of flooding across the whole of the Borough. The proposed allocation in Hollins Green is within Flood Zone 1 and therefore flooding is not considered to be an issue. Parts 16 and 17 of the policy require the site to put in appropriate drainage provision, improve water and sewage networks and ensure that the development mitigates against climate change.
- 10.3 **There has been concern that development will increase congestion/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. Together these measures will have a positive impact on air quality.

- 10.4 **It was raised that development does not meet the needs of the area, including the need for bungalows for older people.** 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.
- 10.5 **Cheshire Wildlife Trust states 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.
- 10.6 **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.
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 one ownership. The relatively unconstrained and green field 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.
- 11.2 The site promoters have confirmed their commitment to delivering the site in the early part of the plan period in their Regulation 19 consultation response (see paragraph 5.4) (UPSVL 0429). They have stated that they would, on the adoption of the Plan (in 2023), submit a planning application with an anticipated completion of the first homes on the site in 2024/2025. The Council is confident that the site will be delivered within the period envisaged.
12. **What is the situation in relation to land ownership and developer interest?**
- 12.1 The site promoters Richborough Estates have confirmed that they have an agreement with the landowners to promote the site in their Regulation 19 consultation response (see paragraph 4.3) (UPSVL 0429).
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.

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.